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SYSTEMS

EXAMINED AND COMPARED

AS TO THEIR MORAL TENDENCY.

IN A SERIES OF LECTURES

DELIVERED AT THE

THEATRE OF VITAL AND PRACTICAL RELIGION.

THEY ARE NOW PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM.

AS WHEN IT APPEARED.

A POSTSCRIPT

CONTAINING THE RESULTS OF THE WORK
AND THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE
LECTURES, MR. HILLMAN, &c.

BY ANDREW FULLER.

There is now a new and more complete edition of the work.

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THE
CALVINISTIC AND SOCINIAN
SYSTEMS

EXAMINED AND COMPARED,
AS TO THEIR MORAL TENDENCY:
IN A SERIES OF LETTERS,
ADDRESSED TO THE
FRIENDS OF VITAL AND PRACTICAL RELIGION.

.....
From a new and correct London Edition.
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TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A POSTSCRIPT,
ESTABLISHING THE PRINCIPLE OF THE WORK
AGAINST THE EXCEPTIONS OF DR.
TOULMIN, MR. BELSHAM, &c.

==
BY ANDREW FULLER.
==

Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ
in sincerity. PAUL.

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ANALYTICAL AND SOCIALLY

SYNOPSIS

STANDARD AND CONTRACT

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PREFACE.

THE following Letters are addressed to *the friends of vital and practical religion*, because the Author is persuaded that the very essence of true piety is concerned in this controversy ; and that *godly men* are the only proper judges of divine truth, being the only humble, upright, and earnest inquirers after it. So far from thinking with Dr. Priestley, that “ an unbiassed temper of mind is attained in consequence of becoming more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it ;” he is satisfied that persons of that description have a most powerful bias against the truth. Though it were admitted that false principles, accompanied with a bigotted attachment to them, are worse than none ; yet he cannot admit that irreligious men *are* destitute of principles. He has no notion of human minds being unoccupied, or indifferent : he that is not a friend to religion in any mode, is an enemy to it in all modes ; he is a libertine ; he *doth evil*, and therefore *hatcheth the light*. And shall we compliment such a character by acknowledging him to be in “ a favourable situation for distinguishing between truth and falsehood ?” God forbid ! It is *he that doeth his will, that shall know of his doctrine*. The humble, the candid, the upright inquirers after truth, are the persons who are likely to find it ; and to them the Author takes the liberty to appeal.

The principal occasion of these Letters, was, the late union among Protestant Dissenters, in reference to civil affairs, having been the source of various misconceptions ; and as the writer apprehends, improved as a mean of disseminating Socinian principles.

A 2

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 95.

In the late application to Parliament for the repeal of the *Corporation and Test Acts*, the dissenters have united without any respect to their doctrinal principles. They considered themselves as applying merely for a *civil* right ; and that in such an application, difference in theological sentiments had no more concern, than it has in the union of a nation under one civil head or form of government.

This union, however, has become an occasion of many reflections. Serious men of the established church have expressed their surprise that some dissenters could unite with others so opposite in their religious principles ; and had the union been of a religious nature, it must indeed have been surprising. Others have supposed that the main body of dissenters had either imbibed the Socinian system, or were hastily approaching towards it. Whether the suggestion of Dr. Horsley, that “ the genuine Calvinists among our modern dissenters are very few,” has contributed to this opinion, or whatever be its origin, it is far from being just. Every one who *knows* the dissenters, knows that the body of them are what is commonly called orthodox. Dr. Priestley, who is well known to be sufficiently sanguine in estimating the numbers of his party—so sanguine that, when speaking of the *common people* of this country, he reckons “ nine out of ten of them would prefer a Unitarian to a Trinitarian liturgy ;” * yet acknowledges, in regard to the dissenters, that Unitarians are by far the minority. In Birmingham, where the proportion of their number to the rest of the dissenters is greater than in any other town in the kingdom, it appears from Dr. Priestley’s account of the matter, that those called orthodox are nearly three to one : and throughout England and Wales they have been supposed to be “ as two, if not as three to one, to the Socinians and Arians inclusive.” †

* Def. of Unit. for 1786, p. 61.

† See Dr. Priestley’s Familiar Letters to the inhabitants of Birmingham. Let. iii. xi. Also Mr. Parry’s Remarks on the resolutions of the Warwick Meeting.

If Dr. Horsley found it necessary in support of his cause, to overturn Dr. Priestley's assertion, that "great bodies of men do not change their opinions in a small space of time;" some think he might have found an example more to his purpose, than that of the body of dissenters having deserted their former principles, in the well-known change of the major part of the Church of England; who, about the time of Archbishop Laud, went off from Calvinism to Arminianism. Had this example been adduced, his antagonist might have found some difficulty in maintaining his ground against him; as it is an undoubted fact, and a fact which he himself acknowledges, with several others of the kind, in the *Third* of his *Familiar Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham*.

The supposition, however, of the dissenters being generally gone, or going off to Socinianism, though far from just, has not been without its apparent grounds. The *consequence* which Socinians have assumed, in papers and pamphlets, which have been circulated about the country, has afforded room for such a supposition. It has not been very uncommon for them to speak of themselves as THE DISSENTERS, THE MODERN DISSENTERS, &c. It was said in a paper that was published more than once, "The ancient, like the modern dissenters worshipped one God—they knew nothing of the Nicene or Athanasian creeds."—The celebrated authoress of *The Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts*, is not clear in this matter. That otherwise admirable performance is tinged with the pride of party consequence. "We thank you gentlemen (she says) for the compliment paid the DISSENTERS, when you suppose that the moment they are eligible to places of power and profit, all such places will at once be filled with them,—We had not the presumption to imagine that, inconsiderable as we are in numbers, compared to the established church, inferior too in fortune and influence, labouring as we do under the frowns of the court, and the ANATHEMA OF THE ORTHODOX, we should make our way so readily

into the recesses of royal favour.”—Even the *Monthly Reviewers*, though they have borne testimony against mingling doctrinal disputes with those of the repeal of the Test-laws;* yet have sometimes spoken of dissenters and Socinians, as if they were terms of the same meaning and extent. “It appears to us as absurd (they say) to charge the religious principles of THE DISSENTERS with republicanism, as it would be to advance the same accusation against the Newtonian philosophy. The doctrine of gravitation may as well be deemed dangerous to the state, as SOCINIANISM.”†

Is it unnatural from such representations as these, for those who know but little of us, to consider the Socinians as constituting the main body of the dissenters; and the Calvinists as only a few stragglers, who follow these leading men at a distance in all their measures, but whose numbers and consequence are so small, that even the mention of their names among protestant dissenters may very well be omitted?

This, however, as it only affects our reputation, or at most can only impede the repeal of the Test-laws, by strengthening a prejudice, too strong already, against the whole body of dissenters, might be over-looked. But this is not all: it is pretty evident that the union among us in civil matters has been improved for the purpose of disseminating religious principles. At one of the most public meetings for the repeal of the *Corporation and Test Acts*, as the author was credibly informed, Socinian peculiarities were advanced, which passed unnoticed, because, those of contrary principles did not choose to interrupt the harmony of the meeting, by turning the attention of gentlemen from the immediate object for which they were assembled. What end could Dr. Priestley have in introducing so much about the Test Act in his controversy with Mr. Burn, on the person of Christ; except it were to gild the pill, and make it go down the easier with Calvinistic dissenters?

* Mon. Rev. enlarged. Vol. I. p. 233.

† M. R. enlarged, for June 1790, p. 247.

The writer of these Letters does not blame the dissenters of his own persuasion for uniting with the Socinians. In civil matters he thinks it lawful to unite with *men*, be their religious principles what they may : but he and many others would be very sorry, if a union of this kind should prove an occasion of abating our zeal for those religious principles which we consider as being of the very essence of the gospel.

The reason why the term *Socinians* is preferred in the following Letters to that of *Unitarians*, is not for the mean purpose of reproach ; but because the latter name is not a fair one. The term, as constantly explained by themselves, signifies those professors of christianity who worship but *one God* : but this is not that wherein they can be *allowed* to be distinguished from others. For what professors of christianity are there, who profess to worship a plurality of Gods ? Trinitarians profess also to be Unitarians : they, as well as their opponents, believe there is but *one God*. To give Socinians this name therefore *exclusively*, would be granting them the very point which they seem so desirous to take for granted, that is to say, the point in debate.

Names, it may be said, signify little ; and this signifies no more on one side, than the term orthodox does on the other. The writer owns, when he first conceived the design of publishing these Letters, he thought so : and intended all along to use the term Unitarians. What made him alter his mind was, his observing that the principal writers in that scheme have frequently availed themselves of the above name, and appear to wish to have it thought by their readers that the point in dispute between them and the Trinitarians, is, Whether there be *three* Gods, or only *one* ?

If he had thought the use of the term *Unitarians* consistent with justice to his own argument, he would have preferred it to that of Socinians ; and would also have been glad of a term to express the system which he has defended, instead of calling it after the name of Calvin ; as he is aware that calling ourselves after the

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THE
CALVINISTIC AND SOCINIAN SYSTEMS
EXAMINED AND COMPARED.

LETTER I.

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL REMARKS.

Christian Brethren,

MUCH has been written of late years on the Socinian controversy ; so much, that the attention of the Christian world has, to a considerable degree, been drawn towards it. There is no reason, however, for considering this circumstance as a matter of wonder, or of regret. Not of *wonder* : for supposing the Deity and atonement of Christ to be divine truths, they are of such importance in the christian scheme as to induce the adversaries of the gospel to bend their main force against them, as against *the rock on which Christ hath built his church*. Not of *regret* : for whatever partial evils may arise from a full discussion of a subject, the interests of truth will, doubtless, in the end prevail ; and the prevalence of truth is a good that will outweigh all the ills that may have attended its discovery. Controversy engages a number of persons of different talents and turns of mind ; and by this means the subject is likely to be considered in every view in which it is capable of being exhibited to advantage.

The point of light in which the subject will be considered in these letters, namely, *as influencing the heart and life*, has been frequently glanced at on both sides. I do not recollect, however, to have seen this view of it professedly and separately handled.

In the great controversy in the time of Elijah, recourse was had to an expedient by which the question was decided. Each party built an altar, cut in pieces a bullock, and laid the victim upon the wood, but put no fire under; and the God that should answer by fire, was to be acknowledged as the **TRUE GOD**. We cannot bring our controversies to such a criterion as this: we may bring them to one, however, which, though not so suddenly, is not much less sensibly evident. The tempers and lives of men are books, for common people to read; and they will read them, even though they should read nothing else. They are indeed warranted by the scriptures themselves to judge of the nature of doctrines, by their holy or unholy tendency. The true gospel is to be known by its being a *doctrine according to godliness; teaching those who embrace it to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world*. Those, on the other hand, *who believe not the truth*, are said to *have pleasure in unrighteousness*. *Profane and vain babblings*, as the ministrations of false teachers are called, *will increase unto more ungodliness; and their word will eat as doth a canker.** To this may be added, that the parties themselves, engaged in this controversy, have virtually acknowledged the justice and importance of the above criterion; in that both sides have incidentally endeavoured to avail themselves of it. A criterion then by which the common people will judge, by which

* 1 Tim. vi. 3. Tit. ii. 12. 2 Thes. ii. 2. 1 Tim. ii. 16, 17.

the scripture authorises them to judge, and by which both sides in effect agree to be judged, cannot but be worthy of particular attention.

I feel, for my own part, satisfied not only of the truth and importance of the doctrines in question, but also of their holy tendency. I am aware, however, that others think differently, and that a considerable part of what I have to advance must be on the defensive.

“Admitting the truth,” says Dr. Priestley, “of a trinity of persons in the Godhead, original sin, arbitrary predestination, atonement by the death of Christ, and the plenary inspiration of the scriptures, their *value*, estimated by their influence on the morals of men, cannot be supposed, even by the admirers of them, to be of any moment, compared to the doctrine of the resurrection of the human race to a life of retribution : and, in the opinion of those who reject them, they have a very unfavourable tendency, giving wrong impressions concerning the character and moral government of God, and such as might tend, if they have any effect, to relax the obligations of virtue.”*

In many instances Dr. Priestley deserves applause for his frankness and fairness as a disputant : in this passage, however, as well as in some others, the admirers of the doctrines he mentions are unfairly represented. They who embrace the other doctrines are supposed to hold that of *arbitrary* predestination ; but this supposition is not true. The term *arbitrary* conveys the idea of caprice ; and in this connexion denotes, that, in predestination, according to the Calvinistic notion of it, God resolves upon the fates of men, and appoints them to this or that, without any *reason* for so doing. But there is no justice in this representation. There is no

* Lett. to Phil. Unb. Pt. ii, p. 33, 35.

decree in the divine mind that we consider as void of reason. Predestination to death is on account of sin ; and as to predestination to life, though it be not on account of any works of righteousness which we have done, yet it does not follow that God has no reason whatever for what he does. The sovereignty of God is a *wise*, and not a capricious sovereignty. If he hide the glory of the gospel from the wise and prudent, and reveal it unto babes, it is because *it seemeth good in his sight*. But if it seem *good* in the sight of God, it must, all things considered, be good : for the judgment of God is according to truth.

It is asserted also that the admirers of the forementioned doctrines cannot, and do not, consider them as of equal importance with that of the resurrection of the human race to a life of retribution. But this, I am satisfied, is not the case : for whatever Dr. Priestley may think, *they* consider them, or at least some of them, as essential to true holiness ; and of such consequence, even to the doctrine of the resurrection of the human race to a life of retribution, that, without them, such a resurrection would be a curse to mankind rather than a blessing.

There is one thing, however, in the above passage, wherein we all unite ; and this is, that the *value* or *importance* of religious principles is to be estimated by their influence on the morals of men. By this rule let the forementioned doctrines, with their opposites, be tried. If either those or these will not abide the trial, they ought to be rejected.

Before we enter upon a particular examination of the subject, however, I would make three or four general observations.

First, Whatever Dr. Priestley or any others have said, of the immoral tendency of our principles, I am persuaded that I may take it for granted, they do not mean to suggest, that we are not good members of civil society, or worthy of the most perfect toleration in the state; nor have I any such meaning in what may be suggested concerning theirs.—I do not know any religious denomination of men, who are unworthy of civil protection. So long as their practices do not disturb the peace of society, and there be nothing in their avowed principles inconsistent with their giving security for their good behaviour, they doubtless ought to be protected in the enjoyment of every civil right to which their fellow citizens at large are entitled.

Secondly, It is not the bad conduct of a few individuals, in any denomination of christians, that proves any thing on either side; even though they may be zealous advocates for the peculiar tenets of the party which they espouse. It is the conduct of the *general body* from which we ought to form our estimate.—That there are men of bad character who attend on our preaching, is not denied; perhaps some of the worst: but if it be so, it proves nothing to the dishonour of our principles. Those, who, in the first ages of christianity, were not humbled by the gospel, were generally hardened by it. Nay, were it allowed that we have a greater number of *hypocrites* than the Socinians, (as it hath been insinuated that the *hypocrisy* and *preciseness* of some people afford matter of just disgust to speculative Unitarians) I do not think this supposition, any more than the other, dishonourable to our principles. The defect of hypocrites lies not so much in the thing professed, as in the sincerity of their profession. The thing professed may be excellent, and perhaps is the more likely to be so.

from its being counterfeited ; for it is not usual to counterfeit things of no value. Those persons who entertain low and diminutive ideas of the evil of sin and the dignity of Christ, must, in order to be thought religious by us, counterfeit the contrary ; but, among Socinians, the same persons may avow those ideas, and be caressed for it. That temper of mind which we suppose common to men, as being that which they possess by nature, need not be disguised among them in order to be well thought of ; they have therefore no great temptations to hypocrisy. The question in hand, however, is not, What influence either our principles or theirs have upon persons who do not in reality adopt them ; but, What influence they have upon those who do ?*

Thirdly, It is not the good conduct of a few individuals on either side that will prove any thing.—Some have adopted a false creed, and retain it in words, who yet never enter into the spirit of it ; and consequently do not act upon it. But merely dormant opinions can hardly be called *principles* : those, rather, seem to be a man's principles, which lie at the foundation of his spirit and conduct.—Farther ; Good men are found in denom-

* Though the Socinians be allowed, in what is said above, to have but few hypocrites among them ; yet this is to be understood as relating merely to one species of hypocrisy. Dr. Priestley, speaking of Unitarians who still continue in the Church of England, says, " From a just aversion to every thing that looks like *hypocrisy* and *preciseness*, they rather lean to the extreme of fashionable dissipation." Yet he represents the same persons, and that in the same page, as " continuing to countenance a mode of worship, which, if they were questioned about it, they could not deny to be, according to their own principles, idolatrous and blasphemous." *Discourses on Various Subjects*, p. 96. The hypocrisy, then, to which these gentlemen have so just an aversion, seems to be only of one kind.

inations whose principles are very bad ; and good men, by whatever names they are called, are more nearly of a sentiment than they are frequently aware of. Take two of them who differ the most in words, and bring them upon their knees in prayer, and they will be nearly agreed. — Besides, A great deal of that which passes for virtue amongst men, is not so in the sight of God, who sees things as they are. It is no more than may be accounted for without bringing religion or virtue into the question. There are motives and considerations which will commonly influence men, living in society, to behave with decorum. Various occupations and pursuits, especially those of a mental and religious kind, are inconsistent with profligacy of manners. *False apostles*, the very *ministers of Satan*, are said to *transform themselves into the apostles of Christ*, and to *appear as the ministers of righteousness ; even as Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.** There are certain vices, which, being inconsistent with others, may be the means of restraining them. Covetousness may be the cause of sobriety ; and pride restrains thousands from base and ignoble gratifications, in which, nevertheless, their hearts take secret and supreme delight. A decent conduct has been found in pharisees, in infidels, nay, even in atheists. Dr. Priestley acknowledges that “ An atheist may be temperate, good-natured, honest, and in the less extended sense of the word, *a virtuous man.*”† Yet Dr. Priestley would not from hence infer any thing in favour of the moral tendency of atheism.

Lastly, Neither *zeal* in defence of principles, nor every kind of *devotion* springing from them, will prove those principles to be true, or worthy of God.—Several gen-

* 2 Cor. xi. 13, 14, 15.

† Lett. to a Phil. Unb. Pt. i. p. 6. pref.

tlemen, who have gone over from the Calvinistic to the Socinian system, are said to possess greater zeal for the propagation of the latter, than they had used to discover for that of the former. As this, however, makes nothing to the disadvantage of their system, neither does it make any thing to its advantage. This may be owing, for any thing that can be proved to the contrary, to their having found a system more consonant to the bias of their hearts, than that was which they formerly professed.—And as to *devotion*, a species of this may exist in persons, and that to a high degree, consistent enough with the worst of principles. We know that the gospel had no worse enemies than the *devout and honourable* amongst the Jews.* Saul, while an enemy to Jesus Christ, was as sincere, as zealous, and as devout in his way, as any of those persons whose sincerity, zeal and devotion, are frequently held up by their admirers in favour of their cause.

These observations may be thought by some, instead of clearing the subject, to involve it in greater difficulties, and to render it almost impossible to judge of the tendency of principles by any thing that is seen in the lives of men. It is allowed the subject *has* its difficulties, and that the foregoing observations are a *proof* of it: but I hope to make it appear, whatever difficulties may on these accounts attend the subject, that there is still enough in the general spirit and conduct of men, by which to judge of the tendency of their principles.

I am, &c.

* Acts xiii. 50.

LETTER II.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR TENDENCY TO
CONVERT PROFLIGATES TO A LIFE OF HOLINESS.

Christian Brethren,

YOU need not be told, that being *born again—created in Christ Jesus—converted—becoming as a little child*, &c. are phrases expressive of a change of heart, which the scriptures make necessary to a life of holiness here, and to eternal life hereafter. It is on this account that I begin with *conversion*, considering it as the commencement of a holy life.

A change of this sort was as really necessary for *Nicodemus*, whose outward character, for aught appears, was respectable, as for *Zaccheus*, whose life had been devoted to the sordid pursuits of avarice. Few, I suppose, will deny this to be the doctrine taught in the New Testament. But, should this be questioned, should the necessity of a change of heart in some characters be denied, still it will be allowed necessary in others. Now, as a change is more conspicuous, and consequently more convincing, in such persons who have walked in an abandoned course, than in those of a more sober life, I have fixed upon the conversion of *profligates*, as a suitable topic for the present discussion.

There are two methods of reasoning which may be used in ascertaining the moral tendency of principles. The first is, by comparing the nature of the principles themselves with the nature of true holiness, and the agreement or disagreement of the one with the other. The second is, by referring to plain and acknowledged

facts, judging of the nature of causes by their effects. Both these methods of reasoning, which are usually expressed by the terms *a priori*, and *a posteriori*, will be used in this and the following Letters, as the nature of the subject may admit.

True conversion is comprehended in those two grand topics on which the apostles insisted in the course of their ministry—*Repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*. Let us then fix upon these great outlines of the apostolic testimony, and examine which of the systems in question has the greatest tendency to produce them.

Repentance is *a change of mind*. It arises from a conviction that we have been in the wrong; and consists in holy shame, grief and self-loathing, accompanied with a determination to forsake every evil way. Each of these ideas is included in the account we have of the repentance of Job.* *Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea twice, but I will proceed no farther—I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*. It is essential to such a change as this, that the sinner realizes the evil nature of sin. No man ever yet repented of a fault, without a conviction of its evil nature. Sin must appear *exceeding sinful*, before we can, in the nature of things, abhor it, and ourselves on account of it. Those sentiments which wrought upon the heart of David, and brought him to repentance, were of this sort. Throughout the fifty first Psalm we find him deeply impressed with the evil of sin, and that considered as an offence *against God*. He had injured Uriah and Bathsheba, and strictly speaking had not injured God, the essential honour

* Chap. xl. 4. xlii. 6.

and happiness of the divine nature being infinitely beyond his reach; yet as all sin strikes at the divine glory, and actually degrades it in the esteem of creatures, all sin is to be considered in one view, as committed *against God*; and this view of the subject lay so near his heart as to swallow up every other. *Against THEE, THEE ONLY have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight!* It follows, then, that the system which affords the most enlarged views of the evil of sin, must needs have the greatest tendency to promote repentance for it.

Those who embrace the Calvinistic system believe, that man was originally created holy and happy—that of his own accord he departed from God, and became vile—that God being in himself infinitely amiable, deserves to be, and is, the moral centre of the intelligent system—that rebellion against him is opposition to the general good—that, if suffered to operate according to its tendency, it would destroy the well-being of the universe, by excluding God, and righteousness, and peace, from the whole system—that, seeing it aims destruction at universal good, and tends to universal anarchy and mischief, it is in those respects an infinite evil, and deserving of endless punishment—and that, in whatever instance God exercises forgiveness, it is not without respect to that public expression of his displeasure against it, which was uttered in the death of his Son. These, brethren, are sentiments which furnish us with motives for self-abhorrence: under their influence millions have repented in dust and ashes.

But those, on the other hand, who embrace the Socinian system, entertain diminutive notions of the evil of sin. They consider all evil propensities in men, (except those which are accidentally contracted by edu-

cation or example) as being in every sense natural to them, supposing that they were originally created with them : they cannot, therefore, be offensive to God, unless he could be offended with the work of his own hands for being what he made it. Hence, it may be, Socinian writers, when speaking of the sins of men, describe them in the language of palliation ; language tending to convey an idea of pity, but not of blame. Mr. Belsham, speaking of sin, calls it, “human frailty ;” and the subjects of it, “the frail and erring children of men.”*

The following positions are for substance maintained by Dr. Priestley in his treatise on *Necessity* : “That for any thing we know, it might have been as impossible for God to make all men sinless and happy, as to have made them infinite.”—That all the evil there is in sin, arises from its tendency to injure the creature—That if God punish sin, it is not because he is so displeased with it as in any case to “take vengeance” on the sinner, sacrificing his happiness to the good of the whole ; but, knowing that it tends to do the sinner harm, he puts him to temporary pain, not only for the warning of others, but for his own good, with a view to correct the bad disposition in him.—That what is threatened against sin is of such a trifling account, that it need not be an object of dread. “No Necessarian,” says he, “supposes that any of the human race will suffer eternally ; but that future punishments will answer the same purpose as temporal ones are found to do, all of which tend to good, and are evidently admitted for that purpose ; so that God, the author of all, is as much to be adored and loved for what we *suffer* as for what we *enjoy*, his *intention* being equally kind in both. And since God has created us for happiness,

* Sermon on the Importance of Truth, p. 33—35.

what misery can we fear ? If we be really intended for ultimate, unlimited happiness, it is no matter to a truly resigned person *when, or where, or how.*”* Sin is so trifling an affair, it seems, and the punishment threatened against it of so little consequence, that we may be quite resigned and indifferent, whether we go immediately to heaven, or whether we first pass through the depths of hell !

The question at present is not, Which of these representations is true, or consonant to scripture ; but, Which has the greatest tendency to promote repentance ? If repentance be promoted by a view of the evil of sin, this question, it is presumed, may be considered as decided.

Another sentiment intimately connected with the evil of sin, and equally necessary to promote repentance, is, *The equity and goodness of the divine law.*—No man ever truly repented for the breach of a law, the precepts of which he considered as too strict, or the penalties as too severe. In proportion as such an opinion prevails, it is impossible but that repentance must be precluded. Now the precept of the divine law requires us to love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. It allows not of any deviation, or relaxation, during the whole of our existence. The penalty by which this holy law is enforced, is nothing less than the curse of Almighty God. But, according to Mr. Belsham, If God “ mark and punish *every* instance of transgression,” he must be a “ *merciless tyrant ;*” and we must be “ tempted to wish that the reins of universal government were in better hands.”† Mr. Belsham, perhaps, would not deny that perfect

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* Pages 118, 122, 65, 149, 150, 123.

† Serm. p. 34.

obedience is required by the law, according to the plain meaning of the words by which it is expressed, or that the curse of God is threatened against every one that continueth not in *all things* written in the book of the law to do them ; but then this rule is so strict, that to “mark and punish every instance,” of deviation from it, would be severe and cruel. It seems then that God has given us a law, by the terms of which he cannot abide ; that justice itself requires him, if not to abate the precept, yet to remit the penalty, and connive at smaller instances of transgression. I need not inquire how much this reflects upon the moral character and government of God. Suffice it at present to say, that such views must of necessity preclude *repentance*. If the law which forbids “every instance” of human folly, be unreasonably strict, and the penalty which threatens the curse of the Almighty on every one that continueth not in *all things* therein written, be indeed cruel ; then it must so far be unreasonable for any sinner to be required to repent for the breach of it. On the contrary, God himself should rather repent for making such a law, than the sinner for breaking it !

Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, is another essential part of true conversion.—Faith is credence, or belief. Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, is belief of the gospel of salvation through his name. A real belief of the gospel is necessarily accompanied with a *trust* or *confidence* in him for the salvation of our souls. The term *believe* itself sometimes expresses this idea ; particularly in 2 Tim. i. 12. *I know whom I have BELIEVED, and am persuaded that he is ABLE TO KEEP THAT WHICH I HAVE COMMITTED UNTO HIM against that day.* This belief, or trust, can never be fairly understood of a mere confidence in his veracity, as to the

truth of his doctrine ; for, if that were all, the *ability* of Christ would stand for nothing ; and we might as well be said to trust in Peter, or John, or Paul, as in Christ, seeing we believe their testimony to be valid as well as his. Believing, it is granted, does not necessarily, and in all cases, involve the idea of *trust*, for which I here contend ; this matter being determined by the nature of the testimony. Neither Peter, nor any of the apostles, ever pretended that their blood, though it might be shed in martyrdom, would be the price of the salvation of sinners. We may therefore credit their testimony, without trusting in them, or *committing* any thing, as Paul expresses it, *into their hands*. But Christ's blood *is* testified of, as the way, and the only way of salvation. He is said to be *the propitiation for our sins* ; and *by himself to have purged our sins—Through his blood we have forgiveness—Neither is there salvation in any other ; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved—Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.** Hence it follows, that to believe his testimony, must of necessity involve in it a trusting in him for the salvation of our souls.

If this be a just representation of faith in Jesus Christ, we cannot be at a loss to decide which of the systems in question has the greatest tendency to promote it ; and, as faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ is essential to true conversion, we cannot hesitate in concluding, which has the greatest tendency to turn a sinner from the evil of his ways. Not to mention, at present, how Socinian writers disown an “*implicit belief*” in the testimony of the sacred writers,† and how they lean to

* 1 John iv. 10. Heb. i. 3. Eph. i. 7. Acts iv. 12. 1 Cor. iii. 11.

† Dr. Priestley's Def. of Unit. for 1787, p. 66.

their own understanding, as the criterion by which scripture is to be tried ; that which I would here insist upon is, That, upon their principles, all *trust* or *confidence* in Christ for salvation is utterly excluded. Not only are those principles unadapted to induce us to trust in Christ ; but directly tend to turn off our attention and affection from him. Dr. Priestley does not appear to consider him as *the way of a sinner's salvation* in any sense whatever, but goes about to explain the words of Peter, (Acts iv. 12.) *Neither is there salvation in any other, &c.* not of "salvation to eternal life," but "of salvation or deliverance from bodily diseases."* And another writer (Dr. Harwood) of the same cast, in a volume of Sermons lately published, treats the sacred writers with still less ceremony. Paul had said, *Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ ;* but this writer, as if he designed to affront the apostle, makes use of his own words in order to contradict him. "Other foundation than this can no man lay," says he, "other expectations are visionary, and groundless, and all hopes founded upon any thing else than a *good moral life*, are merely imaginary, and contrary to the whole tenor of the gospel."† Whether these things be not aimed to raze the foundation on which the church is built ; and whether this be any other than *stumbling at the stumbling-stone*, and a *setting him at nought*, in the great affair for which he came into the world, let every christian judge. It particularly deserves the serious consideration, not only of the above writers, but of those who are any way inclined to their mode of thinking : For if it should be so that the death of Christ, as a propitiatory sacrifice, is the only medium through

* Fam. Letters. Let. XIV.

† Page 193.

which sinners can be accepted of God; and if they should be found fighting against God and rejecting the only way of escape, the consequence may be such as to cause the ears of every one that heareth it to tingle. Meanwhile, it requires but little penetration to discover, that whatever takes away the only foundation of a sinner's confidence cannot be adapted to promote it.

Brethren! Examine these matters to the bottom, and judge for yourselves, whether you might not as well expect grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles, as to see repentance towards God, or faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, proceeding from Socinian principles.

The foregoing observations serve to show *what may be expected* from the Socinian doctrine, according to the nature of things; let us next make some inquiry into *matters of fact*. We may judge from the nature of the seed sown what will be the harvest: but a view of what the harvest actually is, may afford still greater satisfaction.

First, then, Let it be considered whether Socinian congregations have ever abounded in conversions of the profane to a life of holiness and devotedness to God.—Dr. Priestley acknowledges that “the gospel, when it was first preached by the apostles, produced a wonderful change in the lives and manners of persons of all ages.”* Now if the doctrine which he and others preach, be the same for substance as that which they preached, one might expect to see some considerable degree of similarity in the effects. But is any thing like this to be seen in Socinian congregations? Has that kind of preaching which leaves out the doctrines of man's lost condition by nature, and salvation by grace

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* Let. to 2. Phil. Unb. Pref. p. ix.

only, through the atonement of Christ ; and substitutes, in their place, the doctrine of mercy without an atonement, the simple humanity of Christ, the efficacy of repentance, and obedience, &c.—has this kind of preaching, I say, ever been known *to lay much hold on the hearts and consciences of men* ? The way in which that “wonderful change” was effected, in the lives and manners of people, which attended the first preaching of the gospel, was, by the word preached *laying hold on their hearts.*” It was a distinguishing mark of primitive preaching, that it *commended itself to every man’s conscience.* People could not in general sit unconcerned under it. We are told of some who were *cut to the heart*, and took counsel to slay the preachers ; and of others who were *pricked in the heart*, and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do ? But in both cases the *heart* was the mark at which the preacher aimed, and which his doctrine actually reached. Has the preaching of the Socinians any such effect as this ? Do they so much as expect it should ? Were any of their hearers, by any means, to feel pricked in their hearts, and come to them with the question, *What shall we do ?* would they not pity them as enthusiasts, and be ready to suspect that they had been among the Calvinists ? If any counsel were given, would it not be such as should tend to impede their repentance, rather than promote it ; and instead of directing them to Jesus Christ, as was the practice of the primitive preachers, would they not endeavour to lead them into another course ?

Socinian writers cannot so much as *pretend*, that their doctrine has been used to convert profligate sinners to the love of God and holiness. Dr. Priestley’s scheme will not enable him to account for such changes where christianity is ceased to be a *novelty*. The absolute

novelty of the gospel when first preached, he represents as the cause of its wonderful efficacy ; but in the present age, among persons who have long heard it, and have contracted vicious habits notwithstanding, he looks for no such effects. He confesses himself “ less solicitous about the conversion of unbelievers *who are much advanced in life*, than of younger persons, and that because he despairs of the principles of christianity having much effect upon the lives of those whose dispositions and habits are already formed.”* Sometimes he reckons that the great body of primitive christians must have been “ well-disposed with respect to moral virtue, even before their conversion to christianity ; else, (he thinks) they could not have been so ready to have abandoned their vices, and to embrace a doctrine which required the strictest purity and rectitude of conduct, and even to sacrifice their lives in the cause of truth.”† In his treatise on *Philosophical Necessity*, he declares, that, “ upon the principles of the Necessarian, all late repentance, and especially after long and confirmed habits of vice, is altogether and necessarily ineffectual, there not being sufficient time left to produce a change of disposition and character, which can only be done by a

* *Letters to a Phil. Unb. Part II. Pref.* It is true, Dr Priestley is not here speaking of the profligates among nominal christians, but of those among avowed infidels. This, however, makes nothing to the argument. The dispositions and habits of profane nominal christians, are as much formed as those of avowed infidels ; and their conversion to a holy life is as much an object of despair as the other. Yea, Dr. Priestley in the same place acknowledges, that, “ to be mere nominal christians is worse than to be no christians at all.”

† Let. to a Phil. Unb. Pt. ii. p. 167, 168.

change of conduct, and of proportionably long continuance.”*

I confess, I do not perceive the *consistency* of these passages with each other. By the power of *novelty* a wonderful change was produced in the lives and manners of men ; and yet the body of them must have been well-disposed with respect to moral virtue ; that is, they must have been in such a state as not to need any wonderful change, else they could not have been so ready to abandon their vices. A wonderful change was produced in the lives and manners of men *of all ages* ; and yet there is a certain age in which repentance is “altogether and necessarily ineffectual.” Inconsistent, however, as these positions may be, one thing is sufficiently evident ; viz. That the author considers the conversion of profligates, of the present age, as an object of despair. Whatever the gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John may affirm, that, according to Dr. Priestley, affords but very little, if any, hope to those who in scripture are distinguished by the name of *sinner*s, *chief of sinners*, and *lost*. He does “not expect such conversion of profligate, and habitually wicked men, as shall make any remarkable change in their lives and characters. Their dispositions and habits are already formed, so that it can hardly be supposed to be in the power of new and better principles to change them.” It cannot be unnatural, or uncandid, to suppose that these observations were made from *experience* ; or that Dr. Priestley writes in this manner on account of his not being used to see any such effects arise from his ministry or the ministry of those of his sentiments.

There is a sort of preaching, however, even since the days of inspiration, and where christianity hath

ceased to be a *novelty*, which has been attended, in a good degree, with similar effects to that of the apostles. Whatever was the cause, or however it is to be accounted for, there have been those whose labours have turned *many*, yea, many *profligates*, to righteousness; and that by preaching the very doctrines which Dr. Priestley charges with being the “corruptions of christianity;” and which a once humble admirer of his attempted to ridicule.* It is well known what sort of preaching it was that produced such great effects in many nations of Europe, about the time of the Reformation. Whatever different sentiments were professed by the Reformers, I suppose they were so far agreed, that the doctrines of human depravity, the deity and atonement of Christ, justification by faith, and sanctification by the influence of the Holy Spirit, were the great topics of their ministry.

Since the reformation there have been special seasons in the churches, in which a religious concern has greatly prevailed, and multitudes were turned from their evil ways; some from an open course of profaneness, and others from the mere form of godliness to the power of it. Much of this sort of success attended the labours of Perkins, Bolton, Taylor, Herbert, Hildersham, Blackerby, Gouge, Witaker, Bunyan, great numbers of the ejected ministers, and many since their time in England; of Livingstone, Bruce, Rutherford, M'Culloch, M'Laurin, Robe, Balfour, Sutherland and others in Scotland; of Franck, and his fellow-labourers, in Germany; and of Stoddard, Edwards, Buel, Tennant, and many others in America.† And what Dr. Watts and Dr. Guyse said of

* See Familiar Letters. Lett. xxii. P. S.

† See Gillies' Historical Collections.

the success of Mr. Edwards, and some others, in America, might with equal truth have been said of the rest: "That it was the common plain Protestant doctrine of the Reformation, without stretching towards the Antinomians on the one side, or the Arminians on the other, that the Spirit of God had been pleased to honour with such illustrious success."*

Nor are such effects peculiar to past ages. A considerable degree of the same kind of success has attended the Calvinistic churches in North America, within the last ten years; especially in the States of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia.† Nor is it peculiar to the Western world, though they have been greatly favoured. I believe there are hundreds of ministers now in this kingdom, some in the established church, and some out of it, who could truly say to a considerable number of their auditors, as Paul said to the Corinthians; *Ye are our epistle, known and read of all men—ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God: not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart.* There are likewise hundreds of congregations which might with propriety be addressed in the language of the same apostle to the same people; *And such were some of you; (namely, fornicators, adulterers, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners,) but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified.* And those ministers by whose instrumentality these effects were produced, like their predecessors before mentioned, have dwelt principally on the Protestant doctrines of man's lost condition by

* Pref. to Mr. Edwards' Narrative.

† See Rippon's Baptist Register, for 1790, Part I, II.

nature, and salvation by grace only, through the atoning blood of Christ ; together with the necessity of the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit. When, therefore, they see such effects attend their labours, they think themselves warranted to ascribe them, as the apostle did, *to the name of the Lord Jesus, and to the Spirit of our God.**

The solid and valuable effects produced by this kind of preaching are attested by the late Mr. Robinson of Cambridge, as well as by Dr. Watts, and Dr. Guyse. "Presumption and despair," said that ingenious writer, "are the two dangerous extremes to which mankind are prone in religious concerns. Charging home sin precludes the first, proclaiming redemption prevents the last. This has been the method which the Holy Spirit has thought fit to seal and succeed in the hands of his ministers. Wickliffe, Luther, Knox, Latimer, Gilpin, Bunyan, Livingstone, Franck, Blair, Elliot, Edwards, Whitefield, Tennant, and *all* who have been eminently blessed to the revival of *practical godliness*, have constantly availed themselves of this method ; and, prejudice apart, it is impossible to deny, that great and excellent moral effects have followed."†

Should it be alleged that Mr. Robinson, before he died, changed his opinions in these matters, and reckoned all such things as these *enthusiasm* ; it might be answered, A change of opinion in Mr. Robinson can make no change in the "facts," as he justly calls them, which he did himself the honour to record. Besides, the effects of this kind of preaching are not only recorded by Mr. Robinson, but by those who

* 2 Cor. iii 2, 3. 1 Cor. vi. 12.

† Translation of Claude, Vol. II, p. 364. Note.

triumph in his conversion to their principles. Dr. Priestley professes to think highly of the Methodists, and acknowledges that they have “civilized and christianized a great part of the uncivilized and unchristianized part of this country.”* Also, in his *Discourses on Various Subjects*, he allows their preaching to produce “more striking effects” than that of Socinians, and goes about to account for it.†

A matter of fact so notorious as this, and of so much consequence in the controversy, requires to be well accounted for. Dr. Priestley seems to have felt the force of the objection that might be made to his principles on this ground, and therefore attempts to obviate it. But by what medium is this attempted? The same principle by which he tries to account for the wonderful success of the gospel in the primitive ages, is to account for the effects produced by such preaching as that of the Methodists; *The ignorance of their auditors giving what they say to them the force of NOVELTY*. The Doctor is pleased to add, “Our people having in general been brought up in habits of virtue, such great changes in character and conduct are less necessary in their case.”‡

A few remarks in reply to the above shall close this Letter.—First, If novelty be indeed that efficacious principle which Dr. Priestley makes it to be, one should think it were desirable every century or two, at least, to have a new dispensation of religion.

Secondly, If the great success of the primitive preachers was owing to this curious cause, Is it not extraordinary that they themselves should never be acquainted with it, or communicate a secret of such

* Fam. Letters, Lett. vii.

† Page 375.

‡ *Discourses on Various Subjects*, p. 375.

importance to their successors? They are not only silent about it, but in some cases appear to act upon a contrary principle. Paul, when avowing the subject matter of his ministry before Agrippa, seemed to disclaim every thing *novel*; declaring that he had said *none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come*. And as to the cause of their success, they seem never to have thought of any thing but *the hand of the Lord that was with them—The working of his mighty power—Who caused them to triumph in Christ, making manifest the savour of his knowledge by them in every place*.*

Thirdly, If novelty be what Dr. Priestley makes it to be, the plea of Dives had much more of truth in it than the answer of Abraham. He pleaded that *if one rose from the dead men would repent*; the novelty of the thing, he supposed, must strike them. But Abraham answered, as if he had no notion of the power of mere novelty; *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead*.

Fourthly, If the success of the apostles was owing to the novelty of their mission, it might have been expected that at Athens, where a taste for *hearing and telling of new things* occupied the whole attention of the people, their success would have been the greatest. Every body knows that a congeniality of mind in an audience, to the things proposed, wonderfully facilitates the reception of them. Now, as the gospel was as much of a novelty to them as to the most barbarous nations, and as they were possessed of a peculiar turn of mind which delighted in every thing of that nature, it might

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* Acts xii. 21. Ephes. i. 19. 2 Cor. ii. 14.

have been expected, on the above hypothesis, that a harvest of souls would there have been gathered in. But instead of this, the gospel is well known to have been less successful in this famous city than in many other places.

Fifthly, Some of the most striking effects, both in early and later ages, were not accompanied with the circumstance of novelty. The sermon of Peter to the inhabitants of Jerusalem* contained no *new* doctrine; it only pressed upon them the same things for substance which they had heard and rejected from the lips of Christ himself; and, on a pre-judgment of the issue by the usual course of things, they would probably have been considered as more likely to reject Peter's doctrine than that of Christ; because when once people have set their hands to a business, they are generally more loth to relinquish it and own themselves in the wrong, than at first to forbear to engage in it. And as to later times, the effects produced by the preaching of Whitefield, Edwards, and others, were many of them upon people not remarkably ignorant, but who had attended such kind of preaching all their lives without any such effect. The *former*, it is well known, preached the same doctrines in Scotland and America, as the people were used to hear every Lord's-day; and that with great effect among persons of a lukewarm, and careless description. The *latter*, in his *Narrative of the work of God in and about Northampton*, represents the inhabitants as having been "a rational and understanding people." Indeed they must have been such, or they could not have understood the compass of argument contained in Mr. Edwards' *Sermons on Justification*, which were delivered about that time, and are

* Acts ii.

said to have been the means of great religious concern among the hearers. Nor were these effects produced by airs and gestures, or any of those extraordinary things in the manner of the preacher, which give a kind of novelty to a sermon, and sometimes tend to move the affections of the hearers. Mr. Prince, who it seems had often heard Mr. Edwards preach, and observed the remarkable conviction which attended his ministry, describes in his *Christian History* his manner of preaching. "He was a preacher," says he, "of a low and moderate voice, a natural delivery, and without any agitation of body, or any thing else in the manner to excite attention, except his habitual and great solemnity, looking and speaking as in the presence of God, and with a weighty sense of the matter delivered."*

Sixthly, Suppose the circumstance of novelty to have great efficacy, the question is, with respect to such preaching as that of the Methodists, Whether it has efficacy enough to render *the truth of the doctrine* of no account? It is well known that the main doctrines which the Methodists have taught, are, *Man's lost condition by nature, and salvation by the atonement of Christ*; but these, according to Dr. Priestley, are false doctrines; no part of christianity, but the "corruptions" of it; and "such as must tend, if they have any effect, to relax the obligations to virtue." But if so, How came it to pass that the preaching of them should "civilize and christianize mankind?" Novelty may do wonders, it is granted; but still the nature of those wonders will correspond with the nature of the principles taught. All that it can be supposed to do, is to give additional energy to the principles which it accompanies. The heating of a furnace seven times hotter than usual, would not endue it with the

* Gillies' Hist. Collections, vol. ii. p. 196.

properties of water ; and water put into the most powerful motion, would not be capable of producing the effects of fire. One would think it were equally evident, that falsehood, though accompanied with novelty, could never have the effect of truth.

Once more : It may be questioned, Whether the generality of people who make up Socinian congregations, stand in less need of a change of character and conduct than others ? Mr. Belsham says, that “rational christians are often represented as indifferent to practical religion ;” and admits, though with apparent reluctance, that “there has been some plausible ground for the accusation.” Dr. Priestley admits the same thing, and they both go about to account for it in the same way.* Now whether their method of accounting for it be just or not, they admit the fact ; and from hence we may conclude, that the generality of “rational christians” are not so righteous as to need no repentance ; and that the reason why their preaching does not turn sinners to righteousness, is not owing to their want of an equal proportion of sinners to be turned.

But, supposing the Socinian congregations were generally so virtuous as to need no great change of character ; or if they did, so well informed that nothing could strike them as a novelty ; that is not the case with the bulk of mankind amongst whom they live. Now, if a great change of character may be produced by the mere power of novelty, Why do not Dr. Priestley, and those of his sentiments, go forth, like some others, to the *highways and hedges* ? Why does not he surprise the benighted populace into the love of God and holiness, with his *new* doctrines ?

* Mr. Belsham's *Serm.* p. 32. Dr. Priestley's *Discourses on Various Subjects*, p. 95.

(New he must acknowledge they are to them.) If false doctrine, such as that which the Methodists have taught, may, through the power of novelty, do such wonders, what might not be expected from the true? I have been told that Dr. Priestley has expressed a wish to go into the streets, and preach to the common people. Let him, or those of his sentiments, make the trial. Though the people of Birmingham have treated him so uncivilly, I hope both he and they would meet with better treatment in other parts of the country; and if by the power of novelty they can turn but a few sinners from the error of their ways, and save their souls from death, it will be an object worthy of their attention.

But should Dr. Priestley, or any others of his sentiments, go forth on such an errand, and still retain their principles, they must reverse the declaration of our Lord, and say; *We come not to call sinners, but the righteous to repentance.* All their hope must be in the uncontaminated youth, or the better sort of people, whose habits in the paths of vice are not so strong but that they may be overcome. Should they, in the course of their labours, behold a malefactor approaching the hour of his execution, What must they do? Alas, like the priest and the Levite, they must *pass by on the other side.* They could not so much as admonish him to repentance, with any degree of hope; because they consider “all late repentance, and especially after long and confirmed habits of vice, as absolutely and necessarily ineffectual.”* Happy for many a poor wretch of that description, happy

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* See Dr. Priestley's Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 238. Also his doctrine of Phil. Necessity, p. 156.

especially for the poor thief upon the cross, that Jesus Christ acted on a different principle !

These, brethren, are matters that come within the knowledge of every man of observation ; and it behoves you in such cases to know *not the speech of them that are puffed up, but the power.*

I am, &c.



LETTER III.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR TENDENCY
TO CONVERT PROFESSED UNBELIEVERS.

Christian Brethren,

SOCINIAN writers are very sanguine on the tendency of their views of things to convert infidels ; namely, Jews, Heathens and Mahometans. They reckon that our notions of the Trinity, form the grand obstacle to their conversion. Dr. Priestley often suggests, that so long as we maintain the Deity of Jesus Christ, there is no hope of converting the Jews, because this doctrine contradicts the first principle of their religion, *the unity of God*. Things, not altogether, but nearly similar, are said concerning the conversion of the Heathens and Mahometans, especially the latter. On this subject the following observations are submitted to your consideration.

With respect to the *Jews*, they know very well that those who believe in the Deity of Christ, *profess* to believe in the unity of God ; and if *they* will not admit this to be consistent, they must depart from

what is plainly implied in the language of their ancestors. If the Jews in the time of Christ had thought it impossible, or, which is the same thing, inconsistent with the unity of God, that God the Father should have a Son equal to himself, How came they to attach the idea of *equality* to that of Sonship? Jesus asserted that God was his *own Father*; which they understood as making himself *equal with God*; and therefore sought to kill him as a blasphemer.* Had the Jews affixed those ideas to sonship which are entertained by our opponents, namely, as implying nothing more than simple humanity, Why did they accuse Jesus of blasphemy for assuming it? They did not deny that, to be God's *own Son*, was to be equal with the Father; nor did they allege that such an equality would destroy the divine unity; a thought of this kind seems never to have occurred to their minds. The idea to which they objected was, *That Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God*; and hence, it is probable, the profession of this great article was considered in the apostolic age as the criterion of christianity.† Were this article admitted by the modern Jews, they must reason differently from their ancestors, if they scrupled to admit that Christ is equal with the Father.

The Jews were greatly offended at our Lord's words; and his not explaining them so as to remove the stumbling-block out of the way, may serve to teach us how we ought to proceed in removing stumbling-blocks out of the way of their posterity. *For this cause they sought to kill him---because he had said that God was his Father, MAKING HIMSELF EQUAL WITH GOD. Jesus said, I and my Father are one. They then took up stones to stone him, When he told them of many*

* John v. 18.

† Acts viii. 37.

good works that he had shewn them ; and asked, *For which of those works do ye stone me ?* They replied, *For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy ; and because thou, BEING A MAN, MAKEST THYSELF GOD.** From hence it is evident, that, whether Jesus Christ be truly God, or not, they understood him as asserting that so he *was* ; that is, they understood his claiming the relation of *God's own Son*, and declaring that *He and his Father were one*, as implying so much. This was their stumbling-block. Nor does it appear that Jesus did any thing towards removing it out of their way. It is certain he did not so remove it, as to afford them the least satisfaction ; for they continued to think him guilty of the same blasphemy to the last, and for that adjudged him worthy of death.† If Jesus *never thought of being equal with God*, it is a pity there should have been such a misunderstanding between them ; a misunderstanding that proved the occasion of putting him to death !

Such an hypothesis, to be sure, may answer one end ; it may give us a more favourable idea of the conduct of the Jews than we have been wont to entertain. If it does not entirely justify their procedure, it greatly extenuates it. They erred, it seems, in imagining that Jesus, in declaring himself *the Son of God*, made himself *equal with God* : and thus, through mistaking his meaning, put him to death as a blasphemer. But, then, it might be pleaded on their behalf, that Jesus never suggested that they were in an error in that matter—that, instead of informing them that the name *Son of God* implied nothing more than simple humanity, he went on to say, among other

* John v. 18. x. 30, 33.

† Matt. xxvi. 63, 66.

things, *That all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father.* And instead of disowning with abhorrence the idea of making himself *God*, he seemed to justify it, by arguing from the less to the greater ; from the image of the thing to the thing itself.*

Now these things considered, should an impartial jury sit in judgment upon their conduct, one would think they could not, with Stephen, bring it in *murder* ; to make the most of it, it could be nothing worse than manslaughter. All this may tend to conciliate the Jews, as it tends to roll away the reproach which, in the esteem of christians, lies upon their ancestors, for crucifying the Lord of glory ; but whether it will have any influence towards their conversion, is another question. It is possible, that in proportion as it confirms their good opinion of their forefathers, it may confirm their ill opinion of Jesus, for having, by his obscure and ambiguous language, given occasion for such a misunderstanding between them. Could the Jews but once be brought to feel that temper of mind which, it is predicted in their own prophets, they shall feel ; could they but *look on him, whom they have pierced, and mourn for him as one mourneth for his only Son, and be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his first born* ; I should be under no apprehensions for their acknowledging his proper Divinity, or embracing him as the great atonement, to the *fountain* of whose blood they would joyfully repair, that they might be cleansed from their sin and their uncleanness.†

Nearly the same things might be observed respecting *Heathens* and *Mahometans*. We may so model the

* John v. 18. and x. 34—36 † Zech. xii. 10—14. xiii. 1.

gospel as almost to accommodate it to their taste, and by this means we may come nearer together; but whether, in so doing, we shall not be rather converted to them, than they to us, deserves to be considered. Christianity may be so heathenized, that a man may believe in it, and yet be no christian. Were it true, therefore, that Socinianism had a tendency to induce professed infidels, by meeting them as it were half-way, to take upon them the christian name, still it would not follow that it was of any real use. The Popish missionaries, of the last century, in China, acted upon the principle of accommodation. They gave up the main things in which Christians and Heathens had been used to differ, and allowed the Chinese every favourite species of idolatry. The consequence was, they had a great many converts, such as they were; but thinking people looked upon the missionaries as more converted to Heathenism, than the Chinese Heathens to Christianity.*

But even this effect is more than may be expected from Socinian doctrine among the Heathen. The Popish Missionaries had engines to work with, which Socinians have not. They were sent by an authority, which, at that time, had weight in the world; and their religion was accompanied with pomp and superstition. These were matters, which, though far from recommending their mission to the approbation of serious christians, yet would be sure to recommend it to the Chinese. They stripped the gospel of all its *real* glory; and in its place substituted a *false* glory. But Socinianism, while it divests the gospel of all that is interesting and affecting to the souls of men, substitutes nothing in its place. If it be christianity at all,

* Millar's Propagation of Christianity, Vol. II. p. 388, 438.

it is, as the ingenious Mrs. Barbauld is said in time past to have expressed it, "Christianity in the frigid zone." It may be expected, therefore, that no considerable number of professed Infidels will ever think it worthy of their attention. Like *the Jew*, they will pronounce every attempt to convert them by these accommodating principles *nugatory*; and be ready to ask, with him, *What they shall do more by embracing christianity, than they already do?**

Dr. Priestley, however, is for *coming to action*. "Let a free intercourse be opened, says he, between Mahometans and rational, that is, Unitarian Christians, and I shall have no doubt with respect to the consequence."† And again, "Let the Hindoos, as well as the Mahometans, become acquainted with our literature, and have free intercourse with *Unitarian Christians*, and I have no doubt but the result will be in favour of Christianity."‡ So then when Heathens and Mahometans are to be converted, Trinitarians, like

* Mr. Levi's *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, pp. 76, 77.

† *Lett. to a Phil. Unb.* Part II. pp. 116, 121.

‡ "Rational, that is Unitarian Christians"—Why need Dr. Priestley be so particular in informing his reader that a *rational* christian signifies a *Unitarian* christian? To be sure, all the world knew long enough ago that *rationality* was confined to the Unitarians. Doubtless, they are the people, and wisdom will die with them. When Dr. Priestley speaks of persons of his own sentiments, he calls them "*rational christians*." When in the same page, speaking of such as differ from him, he calls them, "Those who *assume* to themselves the distinguishing title of Orthodox." *Consider. on Differ. of Opin.* § 3. Query, Is the latter of these names *assumed* any more than the former And is Dr. Priestley a fit person to reprove a body of people for assuming a name which implies what their adversaries do not admit?

those of Gideon's army, that bowed down upon their knees to drink, must sit at home; and the whole of the expedition, it seems, must be conducted by Unitarians, as by the three hundred men that lapped. Poor Trinitarians; deemed unworthy of an intercourse with Heathens! Well, if you must be denied, as by a kind of *Test-act*, the privilege of bearing arms in this divine war, surely you have a right to expect that those who shall be possessed of it, should act valiantly, and do exploits. But what ground have you on which to rest your expectations? None, except Dr. Priestley's good conceit of his opinions. When was it known that any considerable number of Heathens or Mahometans were converted by the Socinian doctrine? Sanguine as the Doctor is on this subject, Where are the *facts* on which his expectations are founded?

Trinitarians, however, whether Dr. Priestley think them worthy or not, have gone among the heathens, and that not many years ago, and preached what they thought the gospel of Christ; and I may add, from facts that cannot be disputed, with considerable success. The *Dutch*, the *Danes*, and the *English*, have each made some attempts in the East; and, I hope, not without some good effects. If we were to call that conversion, which many professors of christianity would call so without any scruple, we might boast of the conversion of a great many thousands in those parts. But it is acknowledged that many of the conversions in the East were little, if any thing, more than a change of denomination. The greatest and best work, and the most worthy of the name of conversion, of which I have read, is that which has taken place by the labours of the Anglo-Americans among the natives. They have indeed wrought wonders. Mr. Elliot, the first

minister who engaged in this work, went over to New-England in 1632; and, being warmed with a holy zeal for converting the natives, learned their language, and preached to them in it. He also, with great labour, translated the Bible, and some English treatises, into the same language. God made him eminently useful for the turning of these poor heathens to himself. He settled a number of christian churches, and ordained elders over them from among themselves. After a life of unremitted labour in this important undertaking, he died in a good old age, and has ever since been known, both among the English and the natives, by the name of, *The Apostle of the American Indians*.

Nor were these converts like many of those in the East, who professed they knew not what, and in a little time went off again as fast they came: the generality of them understood and felt what they professed, and persevered to the end of their lives. Mr. Elliot's example stimulated many others; some in his life time, and others after his death, laboured much, and were blessed to the conversion of thousands among the Indians. The names and labours of Bourn, Fitch, Mahew, Pierson, Gookin, Thatcher, Rawson, Treat, Tupper, Cotton, Walter, Sargeant, Davenport, Park, Horton, Brainerd, and Edwards, are remembered with joy and gratitude in those benighted regions of the earth. Query. Were ever any such effects as these wrought by preaching Socinian doctrines?

Great things have been done among the heathens of late years by the *Moravians*. About the year 1733, they sent missionaries to *Greenland*; a most inhospitable country indeed, but containing about

“ten thousand inhabitants,” all enveloped in pagan darkness. After the labour of several years, apparently in vain, success attended their efforts; and in the course of twenty or thirty years, about seven hundred heathens are said to have been baptized, and to have lived the life of christians.*—They have done great good also in the most northern parts of North America, among the *Eskimeaux*; and still more among the Negroes in the West-India Islands; where, at the close of 1788, upwards of *thirteen thousand* of those poor, injured, and degraded people, were formed into christian societies. The views of Moravians, it is true, are different from ours in several particulars; especially in matters relating to church-government and discipline; but they appear to possess a great deal of godly simplicity: and as to the doctrines which they inculcate, they are mostly what we esteem evangelical. The doctrine of atonement by the death of Christ, in particular, forms the great subject of their ministry. The first person in Greenland who appeared willing to receive the gospel, was an old man, who came to the missionaries for instruction. “We told him,” (say they) “as well as we could, of the creation of man, and the intent thereof, of the fall and corruption of nature, of the redemption effected by Christ, of the resurrection of all men, and eternal happiness, or damnation.” They inform us afterwards that the doctrine of the cross, or “the Creator’s taking upon him human nature, and dying for our sins,” was the most powerful means of impressing the minds of the heathen, and of turning their hearts to God. “On this account, (they add) we determined, like Paul, to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

* See Crantz’s History of Greenland.

Now consider, brethren, were there ever any such effects as the above wrought by the Socinian doctrine? If there were, let them be brought to light. Nay, let a single instance be produced of a Socinian teacher having so much virtue or benevolence in him, as to make the attempt; so much virtue or benevolence, as to venture among a race of barbarians, merely with a view to their conversion.

But we have unbelievers at home: and Dr. Priestley, persuaded of the tendency of his principles to convert, has lately made some experiments upon them, as being within his reach. He has done well. There is nothing like *experiment* in religion, as well as in philosophy. As to what tendency his sentiments *would have* upon heathens and mahometans, provided a free intercourse could be obtained, it is all conjecture. The best way to know their efficacy is by *trial*, and trial has been made. Dr. Priestley has addressed *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, and *Letters to the Jews*. Whether this seed will spring up, it is true, we must not yet decide. Some little time after he had published, however, he himself acknowledged, “I do not know that my book has converted a single unbeliever.”* Perhaps he might say the same still: and that not only of his *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, but of those *To the Jews*.

If the opinion of the Jews may in any degree be collected from the answer of their champion, *Mr. David Levi*, so far are they from being convinced of the truth of Christianity by Dr. Priestley’s writings, that they suspect whether he himself be a Christian. “Your doctrine, (says Mr. Levi) is so opposite to what I always understood to be the principles of Christianity, that I

* Letters to Mr. Hammon.

must ingenuously confess I am greatly puzzled to reconcile your principles to the attempt. What ! a writer that asserts that *the miraculous conception of Jesus does not appear to him to be sufficiently authenticated, and that the original Gospel of St. Matthew did not contain it*, set up for a defender of christianity against the Jews ! is such an inconsistency as I did not expect to meet with in a philosopher, whose sole pursuit hath been in search of truth—You are pleased to declare in plain terms, *that you do not believe in the miraculous conception of Jesus, and that you are of opinion that he was the legitimate son of Joseph*. After such assertions as these, how you can be entitled to the appellation of a christian, in the strict sense of the word, is to me really incomprehensible. If I am not greatly mistaken, I verily believe that the honour of Jesus, or the propagation of christianity, are things of little moment in your serious thoughts, notwithstanding all your boasted sincerity.”* To say nothing of the opinion of the Jews concerning *what is christianity*, having all the weight that is usually attributed to the judgment of impartial bystanders, the above quotations afford but little reason to hope for their conversion to christianity by Socinian doctrines.

But still, it may be said, we know not what is to come. True ; but this we know, that if any considerable fruit arise from the Addresses above referred to, *it is yet to come* ; and not from those addresses only, but, I am inclined to think, from any thing that has been attempted by Socinians for the conversion of unbelievers.

Is it not a fact, that Socinian principles render men indifferent to this great object, and even induce them to treat it with contempt ? The *Monthly Reviewers*, in

* Mr. David Levi's Letters to Dr. Priestley.

reviewing Mr. Carey's late publication on this subject, infer from his acknowledgments of the baneful influence of *wicked* Europeans in their intercourse with Heathens, and the great corruptions among the various denominations of professing christians, that if so, "far better is the light of nature as communicated to them by their Creator, than any light that our officiousness disposes us to carry to them."* By Europeans, who have communicated their vices to heathens, Mr. Carey undoubtedly meant, not those ministers of the gospel, or those serious christians, who have gone among them for their good; but navigators, merchants, and adventurers, whose sole object was to enrich themselves: and though he acknowledges a great deal of degeneracy and corruption to have infected the christian world, yet the qualifications which he requires in a missionary might have secured his proposal from censure, and doubtless would have done so, had not the Reviewers been disposed to throw cold water upon every such undertaking. If, indeed, there be none to be found among professing christians, except such, who, by their intercourse with heathens, would only render their state worse than it was before, let the design be given up; but if otherwise, the objection is of no force.

The Reviewers will acknowledge, that great corruptions have attended the civil government of Europe, not excepting that of our own country; and, that we are constantly engaged in dissensions on the subject: yet, I have no doubt but they could find certain individuals, who, if they were placed in the midst of an uncivilized people, would be capable of affording them substantial assistance; would teach them to establish

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* *Monthly Review*, for Dec. 1792, p. 447.

good laws, good order, and equal liberty. Nor would they think of concluding, because European conquerors and courtiers, knowing no higher motive than self-interest, instead of meliorating the condition of uncivilized nations, have injured it, that therefore it was vain for any European to think of doing otherwise. Neither would they regard the sneers of the enemies of civil liberty and equity, who might deride them as a *little flock* of conceited politicians, or at best of inexperienced philanthropists, whose plans might amuse in the closet, but would not bear in real life. Why is it that we are to be sceptical and inactive in nothing but religion ?

Had Mr. Carey, after the example of Dr. Priestley, proposed that his *own denomination only* should open an intercourse with Heathens, the Reviewers would have accused him of *illiberality* ; and now, when he proposes that, “ other denominations should engage separately in promoting missions,” this, it is said, would be “ spreading our religious dissensions over the globe.” How, then, are these gentlemen to be pleased ? By sitting still, it should seem, and persuading ourselves that it is impossible to find out what is true religion ; or, if not, that it is but of little importance to disseminate it. But why is it, I again ask, that we are to be sceptical and inactive in nothing but religion ? The result is this : Socinianism, so far from being friendly to the conversion of unbelievers, is neither adapted to the end, nor favourable to the means ; to those means, however, by which *it has pleased God to save them that believe.*

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

THE ARGUMENT, FROM THE NUMBER OF CONVERTS
TO SOCINIANISM, EXAMINED.

Christian Brethren,

IF *facts* be admitted as evidence, perhaps it will appear that Socinianism is not so much adapted to make converts of Jews, Heathens, Mahometans, or Philosophical Unbelievers, as of a speculating sort of people among professing Christians. These in our own country are found, some in the established church, and some among dissenters. Among people of this description, I suppose, Socinianism has gained considerable ground. Of this, Dr. Priestley, and others of his party, are frequently making their boast.* But whether they have any cause for boasting, even in this case, may be justly doubted.

In the first place, Let it be considered, that, though Socinianism may gain ground among speculating *individuals*, yet the congregations where that system, or what bears a near resemblance to it, is taught, are greatly upon the decline.—There are, at this time, a great many places of worship in this kingdom, especially among the *Presbyterians*, and the *General Baptists*, where the Socinian and Arian doctrines have been taught till the congregations are gradually dwindled away, and there are scarcely enough left to keep up the form of worship. There is nothing in either of these systems, comparatively speaking, that alarms the conscience, or interests the heart; and therefore the congregations where they are taught, unless kept up by

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 93, 94.

the accidental popularity of a preacher, or some other circumstance, distinct from the doctrine delivered, generally fall into decay.

But, farther, Let us examine a little more particularly, what sort of people they, in general, are, who are converted to Socinianism. It is an object worthy of inquiry, whether they appear to be modest, humble, serious christians; such as have known the plague of their own hearts; such in whom tribulation hath wrought patience, and patience experience; such who know **WHOM** they have believed, and who have learned to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord; such who, in their investigation of sentiments, have been used to mingle earnest and humble prayer with patient and impartial inquiry; such, in fine, who have become as little children in their own eyes? *If they be*, it is a circumstance of consequence, not sufficient indeed to justify their change of sentiments, but to render that change an object of attention. When persons of this description embrace a set of new principles, it becomes a matter of serious consideration, what could induce them to do so. But *if they be not*, their case deserves but little regard. When the body of converts to a system are mere speculatists in religion, men of little or no seriousness, and who pay no manner of attention to vital and practical religion, it reflects neither honour on the cause they have espoused, nor dishonour on that which they have rejected. When we see persons of this stamp go over to the Socinian standard, it does not at all surprise us; on the contrary, we are ready to say, as the apostle said of the defection of some of the professors of christianity in his day, *They went out from us, but they were not of us.*

That many of the Socinian converts were previously men of no serious religion, needs no other proof than the acknowledgment of Dr. Priestley, and of Mr. Belsham. It cannot be denied, (says the former) "that many of those who judge so truly, concerning particular tenets in religion, have attained to that cool unbiassed temper of mind in consequence of becoming more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it." And this indifference to *all religion* is considered by Dr. Priestley as "favourable to a distinguishing between truth and falsehood."* Much to the same purpose is what Mr. Belsham alleges, as quoted before, that, "Men who are most indifferent to the *practice* of religion, and whose minds therefore are least attached to any set of principles, will ever be the first to see the absurdity of a popular superstition, and to embrace a rational system of faith."† It is easy to see, one should think, from hence, what sort of characters those are which compose the body of Socinian converts.

Dr. Priestley, however, considers this circumstance as reflecting no dishonour upon his principles. He thinks he has fully accounted for it. So thinks Mr. Belsham, and so think the *Monthly Reviewers*, in their Review of Mr. Belsham's Sermon.‡

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 65.

† *Serm. on Import. of Truth*, p. 32.

‡ I have not scrupled to class the *Monthly Reviewers* among Socinians. Although in a work of that kind there be frequently, no doubt, a change of hands; yet it is easy to see that of late years (a very short interval excepted) it has been principally, if not entirely, under Socinian direction; and, so far as religion is concerned, has been used as an instrument for the propagation of that system. Impartiality towards Calvinistic writers is

Surely Socinians must be wretchedly driven, or they would not have recourse to such a refuge as that of acknowledging that they hold a gospel, the best preparative for which is a being *destitute of all religion!* "What a reflection is here implied," says Dr. Williams, "on the most eminent Reformers of every age, who were the first to see the absurdities of a popular superstition, and the falsity of reigning principles! What a poor compliment to the religious character of Unitarian reformers! According to this account, one might be tempted to ask—Was it by being indifferent to the practice of religion that Mr. Belsham was qualified to see and pronounce Calvinism to be *gloomy* and *erroneous*, an *unamiable* and *melancholy* system? Charity forbids us to think he was thus qualified; and if so, by his own rule he is no very competent judge; except he is pleased to adopt the alternative, that he is only not, therefore, to be expected from that quarter. It is true, they sometimes affect to stand aloof from all parties; but it is mere *affectation*. Nothing can be more absurd than to expect them to judge impartially in a cause wherein they themselves are parties; absurd however as it is, some persons are weak enough to be imposed upon by their pretences. Perhaps of late years, the *Monthly Review* has more contributed to the spreading of Socinianism, than all other writings put together. The plan of that work does not admit of *argumentation*; a sudden flash of wit is generally reckoned sufficient to discredit a Calvinistic performance; and this just suits the turn of those who are *destitute of all religion*. A laborious investigation of matters would not suit their temper of mind; they had rather subscribe to the well known maxim, that, "Ridicule is the test of truth:" and then, whenever the Reviewers hold up a doctrine as ridiculous, they have nothing to do but to join the laugh, and conclude it to be a "vulgar error, or a popular superstition."

the humble follower of more *sagacious*, but *irreligious* guides.”*

We read of different kinds of preparatives in the scriptures ; but I do not recollect that they contain any thing like the above. Zeal and attention, a disposition to *search* and *pray*, according to Solomon, is a preparative for the discovery of truth.† The piety of Cornelius, which he exercised according to the opportunities he possessed of obtaining light, was a preparative for his reception of the gospel as soon as he heard it.‡ And this accords with our Lord’s declaration ; *He that will do his will shall know of his doctrine*. On the other hand, The cold indifference of some in the apostolic age, *who received not the love of the truth*, but, as it should seem, held it with a loose hand, even while they professed it, was equally a preparative for apostasy.|| We also read of some in Isaiah’s time, who “ *leaned very much to a life of dissipation ;*” they *erred through wine*. *All tables are full of vomit, and filthiness*, (saith the prophet, describing one of their assemblies) *so that there is no place*. He adds, *Whom shall he teach knowledge, and whom shall he make to understand doctrine ?* And what is the answer ? “ *Were the men who leaned to a life of dissipation,*” who loved to suck at the breasts of sensual indulgence, the proper subjects ? No ; *those that were weaned from the breasts, and drawn from the milk*.§ But now, it seems, the case is altered ; and, in order to find out truth, the most likely way is to be divested of *all religion* !

* Discourse on the Influence of Religious Practice, upon our inquiries after truth; in Answer to Mr. Belsham’s Sermon, p. 6.

† Prov. ii. 1—9. ‡ Acts x. || 2 Thes. ii. 10. § Isai. xxviii. 7, 9.

It is true, these things are spoken of what are called “speculative Unitarians,” whom Dr. Priestley calls “men of the world,” and distinguishes them from “serious christians.” He endeavours also to guard his cause by observing, That the bulk of professing christians, or of those who should have ranked as christians, in every age, have been of this description. It must be acknowledged, that there have been lukewarm, dissipated, and merely nominal christians, in all ages of the church, and in every denomination : I suspect, however, that Dr. Priestley, in order to reduce the state of the church in general to that of the Unitarians, has rather magnified this matter. But be that as it may, there are *two* circumstances which render it improper for him to reason from this case to the other :—First, Whatever bad characters have ranked with other denominations, at least with ours, as to their religious creed, we do not own, or consider them as “converts ;” much less do we glory in the spread of our principles, when men of that character profess to embrace them, as this writer does.* If we speak of converts to our principles, we disown such people, and leave them out of the account, as persons whose walk and conversation, whatever be their speculative opinions, discover them to be *enemies to the cross of Christ*. But were Socinians to do so, it is more than probable that the number of converts of whom they boast would be greatly diminished.—Secondly, Whenever irreligious characters profess to imbibe our principles, we do not consider their state of mind as friendly to them. That which we account truth, is a system of holiness ; a system, therefore, which men of “no religion” will never cordially em-

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 98—93, 94.

brace. Persons may indeed embrace a notion about the certainty of the divine decrees, and of the necessity of things being as they are to be, whether the proper means be used or not ; and they may live in the neglect of all means, and of all practical religion ; and may reckon themselves, and be reckoned by some others, among the Calvinists. To such a creed as this, it is allowed, the want of all religion is the best preparative : but then it must be observed, that the creed itself is as false, as the practice attending it is impure, and as opposite to Calvinism, as it is to scripture and common sense. Our opponents, on the contrary, ascribe many of their conversions to the absence of religion, as their proper cause, granting that, “ many of those who judge so truly concerning particular tenets in religion, have attained to that cool unbiassed temper of mind *in consequence* of becoming more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it.” Could this acknowledgment be considered as the mistake of an unguarded moment, it might be overlooked ; but it is a *fact*, a fact which, as Dr. Priestley himself expresses it, “ cannot be denied :” * a fact, therefore, which must needs prove a mill-stone about the neck of his system. That doctrine, be it what it may, to which an indifference to religion in general is friendly, cannot be the gospel, or any thing pertaining to it, but something very near akin to infidelity.

If it be objected, that the immoral character of persons, previous to their embracing a set of principles, ought not to be alleged against the moral tendency of those principles ; because, if it were,

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* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 95.

christianity itself would be dishonoured by the previous character of many of the primitive christians—It is replied, there are two circumstances necessary to render this objection of any force:—First, The previous character of the convert, however wicked it may have been, must have *no influence* on his conversion.—Secondly, This conversion must have such an influence on him, that, whatever may have been his past character, his future life shall be devoted to God. Both these circumstances existed in the case of the primitive christians; and if the same could be said of the converts to Socinianism, it is acknowledged that all objections from this quarter ought to give way. But this is not the case. Socinian converts are not only allowed, many of them, to be men of *no religion*; but the want of religion, as we have seen already, is allowed to have influenced their conversion. Nor is this all; it is allowed, that their conversion to these principles has no such influence upon them as to make any material change in their character for the better. This is a fact tacitly admitted by Mr. Belsham, in that he goes about to account for it, by alleging what was their character previous to their conversion. It is true, he talks of this being the case, “only for a time,” and at length these converts are to “have their eyes opened; are to feel the benign influence of their principles, and demonstrate the excellency of their faith by the superior dignity and worth of their characters.” But these, it seems, like the “annihilation of death,” and the conversion of Jews and Mahometans by the Socinian doctrine, are things *yet to come*.*

* Since the publication of the first edition of these Letters, a report has been circulated, that Dr. Priestley has been mis-

But it will be pleaded, though many who go over to Socinianism are men of no religion, and continue to

represented by the quotation in page 56, which also was referred to in the preface, p. i. Dr. P. it has been said, in the place from whence the passage is taken, was not commending a total indifference to religion, but the contrary; and his meaning was, not that such a disregard to all religion is a better qualification for discerning truth, than a serious temper of mind, but that it is preferable to that bigoted attachment to a system which some people discover.

That Dr. P.'s leading design was to commend a total indifference to religion was never suggested. I suppose this, on the contrary, was to commend good discipline among the Unitarians, for the purpose of promoting religious zeal. His words are, (accounting for the want of zeal among them) "It cannot be denied that many of those who judge so truly concerning particular tenets in religion, have attained to that cool unbiassed temper of mind, in consequence of becoming more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it. Though, therefore, they are in a more favourable situation for distinguishing between truth and falsehood, they are not likely to acquire a *zeal* for what they conceive to be the truth."

The *leading* design of Dr. P. in this passage, it is allowed, was to recommend good discipline, as friendly to zeal; and as a previous indifference to religion in general was unfavourable to that temper of mind which he wished to inspire, in this view he is to be understood as blaming it. Yet, in an *incidental* manner he as plainly acknowledges it to have been favourable for distinguishing between truth and falsehood, and in this view he must be understood as *commending* it. That he does commend it, though in an incidental way, is manifest from his attributing their judging so truly concerning particular tenets in religion to it; and that not merely as an occasion, but as an adequate cause, producing a good effect; rendering the mind more cool and unbiassed than it was before. To suppose that Dr. P. does not mean to recommend indifference

“lean to a life of dissipation,” yet that is not the case *with all*: there are some who are exemplary in their

to religion in general, as friendly to *truth* (though unfriendly to *zeal*) is supposing him not to mean what he says.

As to the question, Whether Dr. P. means to compare an indifference to religion in general, with a serious temper of mind, or with a spirit of bigotry? It cannot be the latter, unless he consider the characters of whom he speaks, as having been formerly bigoted in their attachment to modes and forms. For he is not comparing them with *other people*, but with *themselves at a former period*. So long as they regarded religion in general, according to his account, they were in a less favourable situation for distinguishing between truth and falsehood, than when they came to disregard it. Dr. P.'s own account of these characters seems to agree with mere men of the world, rather than with religious bigots. They were persons, he says, who troubled themselves very little about religion; but who had been led to turn their attention to the dispute concerning the person of Christ, and by their natural good sense had decided upon it. To this effect he writes in pages 96, 97, of his Discourses on Various Subjects. Now, this is far from answering to the character of religious bigots, or of those who at any time have sustained that character.

But, waving this, let us suppose, that the regard which those characters bore towards religion in general, *was* the regard of bigots. In this case, they were a kind of *Pharisees*, attached to modes and forms, which blinded their minds from discovering the truth. Afterwards they approached nearer to the *Sadducees*, became more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it. The amount of Dr. P.'s position would then be, That the spirit of a Sadducee is preferable, with respect to discerning truth, to that of a Pharisee, possessing more of a cool unbiassed temper of mind. The reply that I should make to this, is, That neither Pharisees nor Sadducees possess that temper of mind of which Dr. P. speaks, but are both *a generation of vipers*, different in some respects, but equally malignant towards the true gospel of Christ: and that the humble, the candid, the serious, and the upright en-

lives, men of eminent piety and virtue, and who are distinguished by Dr. Priestley by the name of "serious christians."* To this it is replied :—

quirers after truth are the only persons likely to find it. And this is the substance of what I advanced in page i. of the preface, which has been charged as a *misrepresentation*. I never suggested that Dr. P. was comparing the characters in question with the serious or the candid ; but rather that *let the comparison respect whom it might*, his attributing an unbiassed temper of mind to men in consequence of their becoming indifferent to religion in general, was erroneous ; for that he who is not a friend to religion in any mode, is an enemy to it in all modes, and ought not to be complimented as being in a favourable situation for distinguishing between truth and falsehood.

A writer in the Monthly Review has laboured to bring Mr. Belsham off in the same manner. But instead of affording him any relief, he has betrayed the cause he has espoused, and made Mr. B. reason in a manner unworthy of his abilities. "We apprehend, (says this writer) that Mr. B. does not mean to assert, nor even to intimate, that indifference to religious practice prepared the mind for the admission of *that religious truth which prompts virtuous conduct*." Mr. B., however, *does* intimate, and even assert, that, "the men who are the most indifferent to the practice of religion, will ever be the first not only to see the absurdity of a popular superstition, but to *embrace a rational system of faith*." Does the Reviewer mean then to acknowledge that the rational system *does not include that kind of truth which prompts virtuous conduct* ? There is no truth in his expressions, but upon this supposition.

But this writer not only informs us what Mr. B. did *not* mean, but what he *did* mean. (One would think the Reviewer of Dr. Williams must have been very intimate with Mr. B.) Mr. Belsham meant, it seems, "That the absurdities of a popular superstition are *more* apt to strike the minds of those who are *even* indifferent to religion, *than* of those who are big-

First, Whatever piety or virtue there may be among Socinian converts, it may be doubted whether piety or

oted in their attachment to particular creeds and rites ; and therefore that the former will be more inclined to allow reason to mould their faith, than the latter.”—*Review of Dr. Williams’ Answer to Mr. Belsham*, for Jan. 1792, page 117.

To be sure, if a Reviewer may be allowed to add a few such words as *more*, and *than*, and *even*, to Mr. B.’s language, he may smooth its rough edges, and render it less exceptionable ; but is it true that this was Mr. B.’s meaning, or that such a meaning would ever have been invented but to serve a turn ?

If there be any way of coming at an author’s meaning, it is by his words, and by the scope of his reasoning ; but neither the one nor the other will warrant this construction. Mr. B.’s words are these : “ The men who are the most indifferent to the practice of religion, will ever be the *first* to embrace a rational system of faith.” If he intended merely to assert, that immoral characters will embrace the truth before bigots, his words are abundantly too strong for his meaning ; for though the latter were allowed to be the last in embracing truth, it will not follow that the former will be the *first*. If the rational system were on the side of truth, surely it might be expected that the serious and the upright would be the *first* to embrace it. But this is not pretended. *Serious christians*, by the acknowledgment of Mrs. Barbauld, are the *last* that come fully into it.

The scope of Mr. Belsham’s reasoning is equally unfavourable to such a construction as his words are. There is nothing in the objection which he encounters, that admits of such an answer. It was not alleged, *That there was a greater proportion of immoral characters than of bigots, among Unitarians* ; had this been the charge, the answer put into Mr. B.’s lips might have been in point. But the charge as he himself expresses it, was simply this : “ Rational christians are often represented as indifferent to practical religion.” To suppose that Mr. B. would account for this, by alleging that immoral characters are more likely to embrace the truth than bigots (unless he denominate all bigots who are not Unitarians) is supposing him

virtue led them to embrace that scheme, or were much in exercise in their researches after it.—It has been observed by some who have been most conversant with them, that as they have discovered a predilection for those views of things, it has been very common for them to discover at the same time a light-minded temper, speaking of sacred things and disputing about them with the most unbecoming levity, and indecent freedom; avoiding all conversation on experimental and devotional subjects, and directing their whole discourse to matters of mere speculation. Indeed, piety and virtue are in effect acknowledged to be unfavourable to the embracing of the Socinian scheme: for if “an indifference to religion in general be favourable to the distinguishing between truth and falsehood;” and if, “those men who are the most indifferent to the practice of religion, will ever be the *first* to embrace the rational system,” it must follow, by the rule of contraries, that piety, virtue, and zeal for religion, are things unfavourable to that system, and that pious and virtuous persons will ever be the *last* to embrace it; nay, some may think it very doubtful whether they ever embrace it at all.

to have left the objection unanswered. How is it that there should be so great a proportion of immoral characters rather than of *humble, serious, and godly men*; or of what Mr. Belsham calls, “practical believers?” This was the spirit of the objection; and if the above construction of Mr. B.’s words be admitted, it remains unanswered.

Let Dr. Priestley, or Mr. Belsham, or any of their advocates, who have charged the above quotations with *misrepresentation*, come forward, and, if they be able, make good the charge. Till this is done, I shall consider them as fair and just; and as including concessions, which, though possibly made in an unguarded moment, contain a *truth* which must prove a millstone about the neck of the Socinian system.

Serious christians, according to the account of Mrs. Barbauld, are the most difficult sort of people that Socinian writers and preachers have to deal with; for though they are sometimes brought to renounce the Calvinistic doctrines in theory, yet there is a sort of leaning towards them in their hearts, which their teachers know not how to eradicate. “These doctrines, (she says) it is true, among thinking people are losing ground; but there is still apparent in that class called *serious christians*, a tenderness in exposing them; a sort of leaning towards them, as in walking over a precipice one should lean to the safest side; an idea that they are, if not true, at least good to be believed, and that a salutary error is better than a dangerous truth.”*

Secondly, Whatever virtue there may be among Socinian converts, it may be questioned whether the distinguishing principles of Socinianism have any tendency towards promoting it.—The principles which they hold in common with us; namely, the resurrection of the dead and a future life, and not those in which they are distinguished from us, are confessedly the springs of their virtue. As to the simple humanity of Christ, which is one of the distinguishing principles of Socinianism, Dr. Priestley acknowledges that, “The connexion between this simple truth, and a regular christian life, is very slight.† That, (says the same author) which is most favourable to virtue in Christianity, is the expectation of a future state of retribution, grounded on a firm belief of the historical facts recorded in the scriptures, especially the miracles, the death, and resurrection of Christ. The man who believes these things only, and who, together with

* Remarks on Wakefield’s Enquiry on Social Worship.

† Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 97.

this, acknowledges an universal providence ordering all events, who is persuaded that our very hearts are constantly open to divine inspection, so that no iniquity, or purpose of it, can escape his observation, will not be a bad man, or a dangerous member of society.”* Now these are things in which we are all agreed : whatever virtue therefore is ascribed to them, it is not, strictly speaking, the result of Socinian principles.—If, in addition to this, we were to impute a considerable degree of the virtue of Socinian converts, to “ the principles in which they were educated, and the influence to which they were exposed in the former part of their lives,” we should only say of them what Dr. Priestley says of the virtuous lives of some atheists ; and perhaps we should have as good grounds for such an imputation in the one case, as he had in the other.†

Among the various Socinian converts, Have we ever been used to hear of any remarkable change of life or behaviour which a conversion to their peculiar principles effected ? I hope there are few Calvinistic congregations in the kingdom, but what could point out examples of persons among them, who, at the time of their coming over to their doctrinal principles, came over also from the course of this world, and have ever since lived in newness of life. Can this be said of the generality of Socinian congregations ? Those who have had the greatest opportunity of observing them, say the contrary. Yea, they add, that the conversion of sinners to a life of holiness does not appear to be their aim ; that their concern seems to be to persuade those who, in their account, have *too much* religion, that less will suffice, rather than address

* Letter V. to Mr. Burn.

† Lett. to a Phil. Unb. Part I. Pref. p. vi.

themselves to the irreligious to convince them of their defect. A great part of Dr. Priestley's Sermon on the death of Mr. Robinson is of this tendency. Instead of concurring with the mind of God, as expressed in his word, *O that my people were wise, that they would consider their latter end!* the preacher goes about to dissuade his hearers from thinking too much upon that unwelcome subject.

You will judge from these things, brethren, whether there be any cause for boasting on the part of the Socinians, in the number of "converts which, they tell us, are continually making to their principles;"* or for discouragement on the side of the Calvinists, as if what they account the cause of God and truth were going fast to decline.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

ON THE STANDARD OF MORALITY.

Christian Brethren,

YOU have observed that Dr. Priestley charges the Calvinistic system with being unfriendly to morality, "as giving wrong impressions concerning the character and moral government of God, and as relaxing the obligations of virtue." That you may judge of the propriety of this heavy charge, and whether our system, or his own, tend most to "relax the obligations of virtue," it seems proper to inquire *which of them affords the most licentious notions of virtue itself.* To suppose that the scheme which pleads for relaxation, both in the precept and in the

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 93.

penalty of the great rule of divine government, should after all, relax the least, is highly paradoxical. The system, be it which it may, that teaches us to lower the standard of obedience, or to make light of the nature of disobedience, must surely be the system which relaxes the obligations of virtue, and consequently is of an immoral tendency.

The eternal standard of right and wrong is the moral law, summed up in *love to God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to our neighbour as ourselves*. This law is *holy, just, and good*; holy, as requiring perfect conformity to God; just, as being founded in the strictest equity; and good, as being equally adapted to promote the happiness of the creature, as the glory of the Creator. Nor have we any notion of the precept of the law being abated, or a jot or tittle of it being given up, in order to suit the inclinations of depraved creatures. We do not conceive the law to be more strict than it ought to be, even considering our present circumstances: because we consider the evil propensity of the heart, which alone renders us incapable of perfect obedience, as no excuse. Neither do we plead for the relaxation of the penalty of the law upon the footing of equity; but insist, that though God, through the mediation of his Son, *doth not mark iniquity, in those that wait on him*; yet he *might* do so consistently with justice, and that his not doing so is of mere grace. I hope these sentiments do not tend to “relax the obligations of virtue.” Let us inquire whether the same may be said of the scheme of our opponents.

It may be thought that in these matters, in some of them, at least, we are agreed. And, indeed, I suppose few will care to deny in express terms that the moral law, consisting of a requisition to love God

with all the heart, and our neighbour as ourselves, is an eternal standard of right and wrong. But let it be considered, whether Socinians in their descriptions of virtue and vice, do not greatly overlook the former branch of it, and almost confine themselves to those duties which belong to the latter. It has been long observed of writers of that stamp, that they exalt what are called the *social virtues*, or those virtues which respect society, to the neglect, and often at the expense of others which more immediately respect the God that made us. It is a very common thing for Socinians to make light of religious principle, and to represent it as of little importance to our future well-being. Under the specious name of *liberality of sentiment*, they dispense with that part of the will of God which requires every thought to be in subjection to the obedience of Christ; and, under the disguise of *candour and charity*, excuse those who fall under the divine censure. The scripture speaks of those *who deny the Lord that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction*—and of *those who receive not the love of the truth, being given up to believe a lie*. But the minds of Socinian writers appear to revolt at ideas of this kind; the tenor of their writings is to persuade mankind that sentiments may be accepted or rejected without endangering their salvation. Infidels have sometimes complained of Christianity, as a kind of insult to their dignity, on account of its dealing in *threatenings*; but Dr. Priestley, in his *Letters to the Philosophers and Politicians of France*, has quite removed this stumbling-block out of their way. He accounts for their infidelity in such a way as to acquit them of blame, and enforces christianity upon them by the most inoffensive motives. Not one word is intimated

as if there was any danger as to futurity, though they should continue infidels, or even atheists, till death. The only string upon which he harps, as I remember, is, that could they but embrace christianity, they would be much happier than they are !

If I entertain degrading notions of the person of Christ, and if I err from the truth in so doing, my error, according to Mr. Lindsey, is *innocent*,* and no one ought to think the worse of me on that account. But if I happen to be of opinion, that he who rejects the deity and atonement of Christ is not a christian, I give great offence. But wherefore ? Suppose it an error, why should it not be as innocent as the former ? and why ought I to be reproached as an illiberal, uncharitable bigot for this, while no one ought to think the worse of me for the other ? Can this be any otherwise accounted for than by supposing that those who reason in this manner, are more concerned for their own honour, than for that of Christ ?

Dr. Priestley, it may be noted, makes much lighter of error when speaking on the supposition of its being found in himself, than when he supposes it to be found in his opponents. He charges Mr. Venn, and others, with “striving to render those who differ from them in some *speculative points* odious to their fellow-christians ;” and elsewhere suggests, that, “we shall not be judged at the last day according to our *opinions*, but our *works* ; not according to what we have *thought of Christ*, but as we have *obeyed his commands* :”† as if it were no distinguishing property of a good work, that it originate in a good principle ;

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* Apol. 4th Edit. p. 48.

† Considerations on Differences of Opinion, § III. Defence of Unitar. for 1786, p. 59. Do. for 1787, p. 68.

and as if the meanest opinion, and the most degrading thoughts of Jesus Christ, were consistent with obedience to him. But when he himself becomes the accuser, the case is altered, and instead of reckoning the supposed errors of the Trinitarians to be merely *speculative points*, and *harmless opinions*, they are said to be “idolatrous, and blasphemous.”* But idolatry and blasphemy will not only be brought into account at the day of judgment, but be very offensive in the eyes of God.† For my part, I am not offended with Dr. Priestley, or any other Socinian, for calling the worship that I pay to Christ, idolatry and blasphemy; because if he be only a man, what they say is just. If they can acquit themselves of sin in *thinking* meanly of Christ, they certainly can do the same in *speaking* meanly of him; and words ought to correspond with thoughts. I only think they should not trifle in such a manner as they do with error, when it is supposed to have place in themselves, any more than when they charge it upon their opponents.

If Dr. Priestley had formed his estimate of human virtue by that great standard which requires love to God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to our neighbour as ourselves; instead of representing men by nature as having “more virtue than vice,”‡ he must have acknowledged with the scriptures, that *the whole world lieth in wickedness—that every thought and imagination of their heart, is only evil continually—and that there is none of them that doeth good, no, not one.*

If Mr. Belsham, in the midst of that “marvellous light” which he professes lately to have received,

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 96. † 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

‡ Lett. to a Phil. Unbeliever, Part I, p. 80.

had only seen the *extent* and *goodness* of that law which requires us to love God with *all* our hearts, and our neighbour as ourselves, in the light in which revelation places it ; he could not have trifled, in the manner he has, with the nature of sin, calling it “ human frailty,” and the subjects of it, “ the frail and erring children of men ;” nor could he have represented God in “ marking and punishing every instance of it, as acting the part of a merciless tyrant.”*

Mr. Belsham talks of “ Unitarians being led to form just sentiments of the *reasonableness* of the divine law, and the *equity* of the divine government ;” but of what divine law does he speak ? Not of that surely, which requires love to God with *all* the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves ; nor of that government which threatens the curse of God on every one that continueth not in *all things* written in the book of the law to do them ; for this allows not of a *single transgression*, and punishes *every instance* of human folly, which Mr. Belsham considers as “ merciless tyranny.” He means to insinuate, I suppose, that for the law to take cognizance of the very thoughts and intents of the heart, at least of *every instance* that occurs, is *unreasonable* ; and that to inflict punishment accordingly is *inequitable*. He conceives therefore of a law, it seems, that is more accommodated to the *propensities*, or, as he would call them, *frailties* of the erring children of men ; a law that may *not* cut off all hopes of a sinner’s acceptance with God by the deeds of it, so as to render an *atoning* mediator absolutely necessary, and this he calls *reasonable* ; and of a government that will *not* bring every secret thing into judgment, nor make men accountable for *every idle word*, and this

he calls *equitable*. And this is the “marvellous light” of Socinianism; this is the doctrine that is to promote a holy life; this is the scheme of those who are continually branding the Calvinistic system with Antinomianism.

If the moral law require love to God with *all* the heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and to our neighbour as ourselves; it cannot allow the *least degree* of alienation of the heart from God, or of the *smallest instance* of malevolence to man. And if it be what the scripture says it is, *holy, just, and good*: then, though it require *all* the heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, it cannot be too strict; and if it be not too strict, it cannot be unworthy of God, nor can it be “merciless tyranny,” to abide by it. On the contrary, it must be worthy of God to say of a good law, *Not a jot or tittle of it shall fail*.

Dr. M’Gill, in his *Practical Essay on the Death of Jesus Christ*, maintains that “The Supreme Lawgiver determined from the beginning to mitigate the rigour of the law, to make allowances for human error and imperfection, and to accept of repentance and sincere obedience, instead of sinless perfection.”* But if this were the determination of the lawgiver, it was either considered as a matter of *right*, or of *undeserved favour*. If the former, why was not the law so framed as to correspond with the determination of the lawgiver? How was it, especially, that a new edition of it should be published from Mount Sinai, and that without any such allowances? Or if this could be accounted for, how was it that Jesus Christ should declare that *not a jot or tittle of it should fail*, and make it his business to condemn the conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees, who had lowered its demands,

and softened its penalties, with a view to “make allowance for human error and imperfection?” It could answer no good end, one should think, to load the divine precepts with threatenings of cruelty. A law so loaded would not bear to be put in execution; and we have been taught by Dr. Priestley, in what he has written on the Test-Act, to consider “the continuance of a law which will not bear to be put in execution, as needless and oppressive, and as what ought to be abrogated.”* If repentance and sincere obedience be all that ought to be required of men in their present state, then the law ought to be so framed, and allowance to be made by it for error and imperfection. But then it would follow, that where men *do* repent, and *are* sincere, there are no errors and imperfections to be allowed for. Errors and imperfections imply a law from which they are deviations; but if we be under no law, except one that allows for deviations, then we are as holy, as we ought to be, and need no forgiveness.

If, on the other hand, it be allowed that the relaxation of the law of innocence is not what we have any *right* to expect, but that God has granted us this indulgence out of *pure grace*; I would then ask the reason, why these gentlemen are continually exclaiming against our principles as making the Almighty a tyrant, and his law unreasonable and cruel? Is it tyrannical, unreasonable, or cruel, for God to withhold what we have no right to expect?†

* Fam Let. Letter VI.

† The intelligent reader, who is acquainted with the different sentiments that are embraced in the religious world, will easily perceive the agreement between the Socinian and Arminian systems on this subject. By their exclamations on the

Dr. Priestley defines *justice*, as being, "Such a degree of severity, or pains and penalties so inflicted, as will produce the best effect with respect both to those who are exposed to them, and to others who are under the same government : or in other words, that degree of evil which is calculated to produce the greatest degree of good ; and if the punishment exceed this measure, if in any instance it be an *unnecessary*, or *useless* suffering, it is always censured as *cruelty*, and is not even called justice, but real injustice." To this he adds, "If in any particular case the strict execution of the law would do more harm than good, it is universally agreed that the punishment ought to be remitted."* With an observation or two on the above passage I shall close this letter.

First, That all punishments are designed for the good of the whole, and less, or corrective punishments for the good of the offender, is admitted. Every instance of divine punishment will be not only proportioned to the laws of equity, but adapted to promote the good of the universe at large. God never inflicts punishment for the sake of punishing. He has no such pleasure in the death of a sinner as to put him to pain, whatever may be his desert, without some great and good end to be answered by it : but that, in the case of the finally impenitent, this end should necessarily in-

injustice of God as represented by the Calvinistic system, they both render that a *debt*, which God in the whole tenor of his word declares to be of *grace*. Neither of them will admit the equity of the divine law, and that man is thereby righteously condemned to eternal punishment, antecedently to the grace of the gospel ; or if they admit it in words, they will be ever contradicting it by the tenor of their reasonings.

* *Lett. to a Phil. Unb.* Part I. pp. 100, 101.

clude the good of the offender, is as contrary to reason, as it is to scripture. It does not appear from any thing we know of governments either human or divine, that the good of the offender is necessarily, and in all cases, the end of punishment. When a murderer is executed, it is necessary for the good of the community; but it would sound very strange to say it was necessary for his own good; and that unless *his* good were promoted by it, as well as that of the community, it must be an act of cruelty!

Secondly, That there are cases in human governments, in which it is right and necessary to relax in the execution of the sentence of the law, is also admitted. But this arises from the imperfection of human laws. Laws are general rules for the conduct of a community, with suitable punishments annexed to the breach of them. But no general rules can be made by men, that will apply to every particular case. If Legislators were wise and good men, and could foresee every particular case that would arise in the different stages of society, they would so frame their laws as that they need not be relaxed when those cases should occur. But God is wise and good; and, previous to his giving us the law which requires us to love him with *all* our hearts, and our neighbour as ourselves, knew every change that could possibly arise, and every case that could occur. The question therefore is not, "If in any particular case the strict execution of the law would do more harm than good, whether it ought not to be remitted; but, whether an omniscient, wise, and good law-giver, can be supposed to have made a law, the penalty of which, if put in execution, would do more harm than good? Would a Being of such a character make a law, the penalty of which, according to strict equity, requires to be remitted; a law which he could

not in justice abide by, and that not only in a few singular cases, but in the case of every individual, in every age, to whom it is given ?

It is possible these considerations may suffice to show that the divine law is *not* relaxed ; but, be that as it may, the question at issue is, what is the *moral tendency* of supposing that it is ? To relax a bad law would indeed have a good effect, and to abrogate it would have a better ; but not so respecting a good one. If the divine law be what the scripture says it is, *holy, just* and *good* ; to relax it in the precept, or even to mitigate the penalty, without some expedient to secure its honours, must be subversive of good order ; and the scheme which pleads for such relaxation must be unfavourable to holiness, justice, and goodness.

I am, &c.



LETTER VI.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR TENDENCY
TO PROMOTE MORALITY IN GENERAL.

Christian Brethren,

WHAT has been advanced in the last Letter on the standard of morality, may serve to fix the meaning of the term in this. The term *morality*, you know, is sometimes used to express those duties which subsist between men and men, and in this acceptation stands distinguished from *religion* ; but I mean to include under it the whole of what is contained in the moral law.

Nothing is more common than for the adversaries of the Calvinistic system to charge it with immorality ; nay, as if this were self-evident, they seem to think

themselves excused from advancing any thing like sober evidence to support the charge. Virulence, rant, and extravagance, are the weapons with which we are not unfrequently combated in this warfare. "I challenge the whole body and being of moral evil itself," says a writer of the present day,* "to invent, or inspire, or whisper any thing blacker or more wicked : yea, if sin itself had all the wit, the tongues, and pens of all men and angels, to all eternity, I defy the whole to say any thing of God worse than this. O sin, thou hast spent and emptied thyself in the doctrine of John Calvin ! And here I rejoice that I have heard the utmost that malevolence itself shall ever be able to say against infinite benignity ! I was myself brought up and tutored in it, and being delivered, and brought to see the evil and danger, am bound by my obligations to God, angels, and men, to warn my fellow-sinners ; I therefore here, before God, and the whole universe, recal and condemn every word I have spoken in favour of it. I thus renounce the doctrine as the rancour of devils ; a doctrine, the preaching of which is babbling and mocking, its prayers blasphemy, and whose praises are the horrible yellings of sin and hell. And this I do because I know and believe that God is love ; and therefore his decrees, works, and ways, are also love, and cannot be otherwise." It were ill-spent time to attempt an answer to such unfounded calumny as this, which certainly partakes much more of the ravings of insanity, than of the words of truth and soberness ; yet this, according to the *Monthly Review*, is "The true colouring of the doctrine of Calvinism."† Had any thing like this been written by a Calvinist against Socinianism, the Reviewers would have been the first to have exclaimed against Calvinistic illiberality.

* Lewelyn's Tracts, p. 292. † Review for July 1792, p. 266.

This gentleman professes to have been a Calvinist, and so does Dr. Priestley. The Calvinism of the latter, however, seems to have left an impression upon his mind very different from the above. "Whether it be owing to my Calvinistical education, (says he) or my considering the principles of Calvinism as generally favourable to that leading virtue, *devotion*, or to their being something akin to the doctrine of Necessity, I cannot but acknowledge, that, notwithstanding what I have occasionally written against that system, and which I am far from wishing to retract, I feel myself disposed to look upon Calvinists with a kind of *respect*, and could never join in the contempt and insult with which I have often heard them treated in conversation."*

But Dr. Priestley, I may be told, whatever good opinion he may have of the piety and virtue of Calvinists, has a very ill opinion of Calvinism; and this, in a certain degree, is true. Dr. Priestley, however, would not say that, "The preaching of that system was babbling and mocking, its prayers blasphemy, or its praises the horrible yellings of sin and hell:" on the contrary, he acknowledges "its principles to be generally favourable to that leading virtue, *devotion*."

I confess Dr. Priestley has advanced some heavy accusations on the immoral tendency of Calvinism; accusations which seem scarcely consistent with the candid concessions just now quoted, and these I shall now proceed to examine.—"I do not see, (says he) what motive a Calvinist can have to give any attention to his moral conduct. So long as he is unregenerate, all his thoughts, words and actions, are necessarily sinful, and in the act of *regeneration* he is altogether passive. On this account the most consistent Calvinists never address any exhortations to

* The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity illustrated, p. 163.

sinner, considering them as *dead in trespasses and sins* ; and therefore that there would be as much sense and propriety in speaking to the dead as to them. On the other hand, if a man be in the happy number of the *elect*, he is sure that God will, some time or other, and at the most proper time (for which the last moment of his life is not too late) work upon him his miraculous work of *saving and sanctifying grace*. Though he should be ever so wicked immediately before this divine and *effectual calling*, it makes nothing against him. Nay, some think that this being a more signal display of the wonders of divine grace, it is rather the more probable that God will take this opportunity to display it. If any system of speculative principles can operate as an axe at the root of all virtue and goodness, it is this.* On this unfavourable account of Calvinism, I would offer the following observations :

First, If Calvinism be an axe at the root of virtue and goodness, it is only so with respect to those of the “unregenerate ;” which certainly does not include all the virtue and goodness in the world. As to others, Dr. Priestley acknowledges, as we have seen already, that our principles are “generally favourable to *devotion* ;” and devotion, if it be what he denominates it, “a *leading* virtue,” will doubtless be *followed* with other virtues correspondent with it. He acknowledges also, “There are many (among the Calvinists) whose hearts and lives are in all respects truly christian, and whose christian tempers are really promoted *by their own views of their system*.”† How is it then, that Dr. Priestley “cannot see what motive a Calvinist can have to give any attention to his moral conduct ;” and why does he represent Calvin-

* Doctrine of Necessity, p. 154.

† Ibid, pp. 163, 164.

ism as “an axe at the root of *all* virtue and goodness?” By all virtue and goodness he can only mean the virtue and goodness of wicked men. Indeed this appears plainly to have been his meaning: for, after acknowledging that Calvinism has something in it favourable to “an habitual and animated devotion,” he adds, “But where a disposition to vice has pre-occupied the mind, I am very well satisfied, and but too many facts might be alledged in proof of it, that the doctrines of Calvinism have been actually fatal to the *remains of virtue*, and have driven men into the most desperate and abandoned course of wickedness: whereas the doctrine of necessity, properly understood, cannot possibly have any such effect, but the contrary.”* Now suppose all this were true, it can never justify Dr. Priestley in the use of such unlimited terms as those before mentioned. Nor is it any disgrace to the Calvinistic system, that men, whose minds are pre-occupied with vice, should misunderstand and abuse it. The purest liquor, if put into a musty cask, will become unpalatable. It is no more than is said of some who professed to embrace christianity in the times of the apostles, that they *turned the grace of God into lasciviousness*. Is it any wonder that the wicked will do wickedly; or that they will extract poison from that which, rightly understood, is the food of the righteous? It is enough if our sentiments, like *God’s words, do good to the upright*. *Wisdom* does not expect to be *justified*, but of *her children*. The scriptures themselves make no pretence of having been useful to those who have still lived in sin; but allow the gospel to be *a savour of death unto death in them that perish*. The doctrine of necessity is as liable to produce this effect

* Doctrine of Necessity, p. 162.

as any of the doctrines of Calvinism. It is true, as Dr. Priestley observes, "It cannot do so, if it be properly understood;" but this is allowing that it may do so, if it be misunderstood; and we have as good reason for ascribing the want of a proper understanding of the subject, to those who abuse predestination and other Calvinistic doctrines, as he has for ascribing it to those who abuse the doctrine of necessity. Dr. Priestley speaks of *the remains of virtue* where a disposition to vice has pre-occupied the mind; and of the Calvinistic system being as an axe at the root of these remains: but some people will question, whether virtue of such a description have any root belonging to it, so as to require an axe to cut it up; and whether it be not owing to this circumstance that such characters, like the stony-ground hearers, in time of temptation fall away.

Secondly, The Calvinistic system is misrepresented by Dr. Priestley, even as to its influence on the *unregenerate*.—In the passage before quoted, he represents those persons, "who are of the happy number of the elect, as being *sure* that God will some time or other work upon them his work of sanctifying grace." But how are they to come at this assurance? Not by any thing contained in the Calvinistic system. All the writers in that scheme have constantly insisted, That no man has any warrant to conclude himself of the happy number of the elect, till the work of sanctifying grace is actually wrought. With what colour of truth, or ingenuousness, then, could Dr. Priestley represent our system as affording a ground of assurance, previous to that event? This is not a matter of small account in the present controversy; it is the point on which the immoral ten-

dency of the doctrine wholly depends. As to the *certainty* of any man's being sanctified and saved at some future time, this can have no ill influence upon him, while it exists merely in the divine mind. If it have any such influence, it must be owing to his *knowledge* of it at a time, when, his heart being set on evil, he would be disposed to abuse it; but this, as we have seen, upon the Calvinistic system, is utterly impossible; because nothing short of a sanctified temper of mind affords any just grounds to draw the favourable conclusion. Dr. Priestley has also represented it as a part of the Calvinistic system, or, however, "as the opinion of some," that the more wicked a man is, previous to God's work of sanctifying grace upon him, the more probable it is that he will some time be sanctified and saved. But though it be allowed, that God frequently takes occasion from the degree of human wickedness to magnify his grace in delivering from it; yet it is no part of the Calvinistic system, that the former affords any grounds of probability to expect the latter; and whoever they be that Dr. Priestley alludes to as entertaining such an opinion, I am inclined to think they are not among the respectable writers of the party, and probably not among those who have written at all.

Thirdly, Let it be considered, Whether Dr. Priestley's own views of Philosophical Necessity do not amount to the same thing as those which he alleges to the discredit of Calvinism; or, if he will insist upon the contrary, whether he must not contradict himself, and maintain a system, which, by his own confession, is less friendly to piety and humility, than that which he opposes.—A state of *unregeneracy* is considered by Calvinists as being the same thing which Dr. Priestley

describes as, “ the state of a person who sins with a *full consent of will*, and who, *disposed as he is*, is under an impossibility of acting otherwise ; but who,” as he justly maintains, “ is nevertheless accountable, even though that consent be produced by the efficacy and unconquerable influence of motives. It is only, (continues he) where the necessity of sinning arises from *some other cause, than a man’s own disposition of mind*, that we ever say there is an impropriety in punishing a man for his conduct. If the impossibility of acting well has arisen from a *bad disposition*, or *habit*, its having been impossible, *with that disposition or habit*, to act virtuously, is never any reason for our forbearing punishment ; because we know that punishment is proper to correct that disposition and that habit.”* Now if it be consistent to punish a man for necessary evil, as Dr. Priestley abundantly maintains, Why should it be inconsistent to exhort, persuade, reason, or expostulate with him ; and why does he call those Calvinists “ the most consistent,” who avoid such addresses to their auditors ? If “ the thoughts, words, and actions of unregenerate men, being necessarily sinful,” be a just reason why they should not have exhortations addressed to them ; the whole doctrine of Necessity must be inconsistent with the use of means ; than which nothing can be more contrary to truth, and to Dr. Priestley’s own views of things.

As to our being *passive* in regeneration, if Dr. Priestley would only admit that any one character could be found that is so depraved as to be destitute of all true virtue, the same thing would follow from his own Necessarian principles. According to those principles, every man who is under the dominion of a vicious habit of mind, will continue to choose vice, till such time as

* Doctrine of Necessity, p. 63—65.

that habit be changed, and that by some influence without himself. "If (says he) I make any particular choice to-day, I should have done the same yesterday, and should do the same tomorrow, provided there be no change in the state of my mind respecting the object of the choice."* Now can any person in such a state of mind be supposed to be active in the changing of it; for such activity must imply an inclination to have it changed, which is a contradiction, as it supposes him at the same time under the dominion of evil, and inclined to goodness?

But possibly, Dr. Priestley will not admit that any one character can be found who is utterly destitute of true virtue. Be it so; he must admit that in some characters vice has an *habitual ascendancy*: but the habitual ascendancy of vice as certainly determines the choice, as even a total depravity. A decided majority in parliament carry every measure with as much certainty as if there were no minority. Wherever vice is predominant (and in no other case is regeneration needed) the party must necessarily be *passive* in the first change of his mind in favour of virtue.

But there are seasons in the life of the most vicious men, in which their evil propensities are at a lower ebb than usual; in which conscience is alive, and thoughts of a serious nature arrest their attention. At these favourable moments it may be thought that virtue has the advantage of its opposite, and that this is the time for a person to become active in effecting a change upon his own mind. Without inquiring whether there be any real virtue in all this; it is sufficient to observe, that if we allow the whole of what is pleaded for, the objection destroys itself. For it supposes, that in order to a voluntary activity, in favour of virtue, the

mind must first be virtuously disposed, and that by something in which it was *passive*; which is giving up the point in dispute.

Dr. Priestley often represents “a change of disposition and character as being effected only by a change of conduct, and that of long continuance.”* But whatever influence a course of virtuous actions may have upon the disposition, and however it may tend to establish us in the habit of doing good, *all* goodness of disposition cannot arise from this quarter. There must have been a disposition to good, and one too that was sufficiently strong to outweigh its opposite, ere a course of virtuous actions could be commenced; for virtuous action is nothing but the effect, or expression, of virtuous disposition. To say that this previous disposition was also produced by other previous actions, is only carrying the matter a little farther out of sight; for unless it can be proved that virtuous action may exist prior to, and without all virtuous disposition, let the one be carried back as far as it may, it must still have been preceded by the other; and in obtaining the preceding disposition, the soul must necessarily have been *passive*.†

* Doctrine of Necessity, p. 156.

† Since the publication of the second edition of these Letters, it has been suggested by a friend, that there is no necessity for confining these observations to the case of a man totally depraved, or of one under the habitual ascendancy of vice: for that, according to Dr. Priestley’s Necessarian principles, all volitions are the effects of motives: therefore every man, in every volition, as he is the subject of the influence of motive operating as a cause, *is passive*; equally so, according to the Calvinistic system, as he is supposed to be in regeneration.

Dr. Priestley labours hard to overthrow the doctrine of *immediate divine agency*, and contends that all divine influence upon the human mind is through the medium of second causes, or according to the established laws of nature. "If moral impressions were made upon men's minds by an immediate divine agency, to what end (he asks) has been the whole apparatus of *revealed religion*?"* This in effect is saying, That if there be laws for such an operation on the human mind, every kind of influence upon it must be through the medium of those laws; and that if it be otherwise, there is no need of the use of means. But might he not as well allege, That if there be laws by which the planets move, every kind of influence upon them must have been through the medium of those laws; and deny that the Divine Being immediately, and prior to the operation of the laws of nature, put them all in motion? Might he not as well ask, If an immediate influence could be exercised in setting the material system in motion, of what use are all the laws of nature by which it is kept in motion? Whatever laws attend the movements of the material system, the first creation of it is allowed to have been by an immediate exertion of divine power. God said, *Let there be light, and there was light*; and why should not the second creation be the same? I say the *second creation*; for the change upon the sinner's heart is represented as nothing less in the divine word, and the very manner of its being effected, is expressed in language which evidently alludes to the first creation.—*God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God*

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 221.

in the face of Jesus Christ. Not only scripture, but reason itself teaches the necessity for such an immediate divine interposition in the changing of a sinner's heart. If a piece of machinery (suppose the whole material system) were once in a state of disorder, the mere exercise of those laws by which it was ordained to move, would never bring it into order again ; but, on the contrary, would drive it on farther and farther to everlasting confusion.

As to *election*, Dr. Priestley cannot consistently maintain his scheme of Necessity without admitting it. If, as he abundantly maintains, God is the author of every good disposition in the human heart ;* and if, as he also in the same section maintains, God, in all that he does, pursues one plan or system previously concerted ; it must follow, that wherever good dispositions are produced, and men are finally saved, it is altogether in consequence of the appointment of God, which, as to the present argument, is the same thing as the Calvinistic doctrine of election.

So plain a consequence is this from Dr. Priestley's Necessarian principles, that he himself, when writing his *Treatise* on that subject, could not forbear to draw it. " Our Saviour (he says) seems to have considered the rejection of the gospel by those who boasted of their wisdom,† and the reception of it by the more despised part of mankind, as being the consequence of the express appointment of God. *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes ; even so, Father, for so it*

* Doctrine of Necessity, § xi.

† Query. Were not these the *rational religionists* of that age ?

seemeth good in thy sight." To the same purpose, in the next page but one, he observes, that God is considered as "the sovereign disposer, both of gospel privileges here, and future happiness hereafter, as appears in such passages as 2 Thess. ii. 13. *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.*"*

If there be any difference between that election which is involved in Dr. Priestley's own scheme, and that of the Calvinists, it must consist, not in the original appointment, or in the certainty of the event, but in the intermediate causes or reasons which induced the Deity to fix things in the manner that he has done; and it is doubtful whether even this can be admitted. It is true, Dr. Priestley, by his exclamations against *unconditional election*,† would seem to maintain that where God hath appointed a sinner to obtain salvation, it is on account of his foreseen virtue; and he may plead that such an election is favourable to virtue, as making it the ground, or procuring cause of eternal felicity; while an election that is altogether unconditional, must be directly the reverse. But let it be considered, in the first place, Whether such a view of election as this, does not clash with the whole tenor of scripture; which teaches us that we are *saved and called with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to the divine purpose and grace given us in Christ Jesus before the world began—Not of works, lest any man should boast—At this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace—And if by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more*

* Page 140—142.

† Consequences on Difference in Religious Opinions, § III.

*grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace ; otherwise work is no more work.** Secondly, Let it be considered whether such an election will consist with Dr. Priestley's own scheme of Necessity. This scheme supposes that all virtue, as well as every thing else, is necessary. Now whence arose the necessity of it ? It was not self-originated, nor accidental ; it must have been established by the Deity. And then it will follow, that if God elect any man, on account of his foreseen virtue, he must have elected him on account of that which he had determined to give him ; but this, as to the origin of things, amounts to the same thing as unconditional election.

As to men's taking liberty to sin, from the consideration of their being among the number of the elect ; that, as we have seen already, is what no man can do with safety or consistency, seeing he can have no evidence on that subject but what must arise from a contrary spirit and conduct. But suppose it were otherwise, an objection of this sort would come with an ill grace from Dr. Priestley, who encourages all mankind not to fear, since God has made them all for unlimited ultimate happiness, and (whatever be their conduct in the present life) to ultimate unlimited happiness they will all doubtless come.†

Upon the whole, Let those who are inured to close thinking, judge whether Dr. Priestley's own views of philosophical Necessity, do not include the leading principles of Calvinism ? But should he insist upon

* See also those scriptures which represent election as the *cause* of faith and holiness ; particularly Ephes. i. 3, 4. John vi 37 Rom. viii. 22, 30. Acts xiii. 48 1 Pet. i. 1. Rom. ix. 15, 16. But if it be the *cause*, it cannot be the *effect* of them.

† Doctrine of Necessity, pp. 128, 129.

the contrary, then let it be considered, whether he must not contradict himself, and maintain a system, which, by his own confession, is less friendly to piety and humility than that which he opposes. “The essential difference (he says) between the two schemes is this : The Necessarian believes his own dispositions and actions are the necessary and sole means of his present and future happiness ; so that, in the most proper sense of the words, it depends entirely on himself whether he be virtuous or vicious, happy or miserable. The Calvinist maintains, on the other hand, that so long as a man is unregenerate, all his thoughts, words, and actions, are necessarily sinful, and in the act of regeneration he is altogether passive.”* We have seen already that on the scheme of Dr. Priestley, as well as that of the Calvinists, men in the first turning of the bias of their hearts, must be passive. But allow it to be otherwise, allow what the Doctor elsewhere teaches, that “A change of disposition is the *effect*, and not the *cause* of a change of conduct ;”† and that it depends entirely on ourselves whether we will thus change our conduct, and by these means our dispositions, and so be happy forever ; all this, if others of his observations be just, instead of promoting piety and virtue, will have a contrary tendency. In the same performance Dr. Priestley acknowledges, that, “Those who from a principle of religion ascribe more to God and less to man than other persons, are men of the greatest elevation of piety.”‡ But if so, it will follow, that the essential difference between the necessarianism of Socinians, and that of Calvinists, (seeing it consists in this, that the one makes it depend entirely upon

* Doctrine of Necessity, pp. 152--154. † Ibid. p. 156.

‡ Doctrine of Necessity, p. 107.

a man's self, whether he be virtuous or vicious, happy or miserable, and the other upon God) is in favour of the latter. Those who consider men as depending entirely upon God for virtue and happiness, ascribe more to God and less to man than the other; and so, according to Dr. Priestley, are, "men of the greatest elevation of piety." They, on the other hand, who suppose men to be dependent entirely upon *themselves* for these things, must consequently have less of piety, and more of "heathen stoicism;" which, as the same writer, in the same treatise observes, "allows men to pray for *external things*, but admonishes them that, as for virtue, it is our own, and must arise from within ourselves, if we have it at all."*

But let us come to *facts*. If, as Dr. Priestley says, there be "something in our system, which, if carried to its just consequences, would lead us to the most abandoned wickedness;" it might be expected, one should think, that a loose, dissipated, and abandoned life, would be a more general thing among the Calvinists, than among their opponents. This seems to be a consequence of which he feels the force; and therefore discovers an inclination to make it good. In answer to the question, "Why those persons who hold these opinions are not abandoned to all wickedness, when they evidently lay them under so little restraint?" he answers, "This *is* often the case of those who pursue these principles to their just and fatal consequences"—adding, "For it is easy to prove that the Antinomian is the only consistent *absolute predestinarian*."† That there are persons who profess the doctrine of absolute

* Page 67.

† Consid. on Differ. of Opin. § iii.

predestination, and who, from that consideration, may indulge themselves in the greatest enormities, is admitted. Dr. Priestley, however, allows, that these are “only such persons whose minds are previously depravēd ;” that is, wicked men, who *turn the grace of God into lasciviousness*. Nor are such examples “often” to be seen among us ; and where they are, it is commonly in such people who make no serious pretence to personal religion, but who have just so much of predestination in their heads, as to suppose that all things will be as they are appointed to be, and therefore that it is in vain to strive ; just so much as to look at the end, and overlook the means ; which is as wide of Calvinism as it is of Socinianism. This may be the *absolute* predestination which Dr. Priestley means ; namely, a predestination to eternal life, let our conduct be ever so impure, and a predestination to eternal death, let it be ever so holy ; and if so, it is granted that the Antinomian is the only consistent believer in it ; but then it might with equal truth be added, that he is the only person who believes in it at all. The Calvinistic doctrine of predestination supposes, that holiness of heart and life is as much the object of divine appointment as future happiness ; and that this connexion can never be broken. To prove that the Antinomian is the only consistent believer in such a predestination as this, may not be so *easy* a task as barely to assert it. I cannot imagine it would be very easy, especially for Dr. Priestley, seeing he acknowledges, that “the idea of every thing being predestinated from all eternity is no objection to *prayer*, because all means are appointed as well as ends ; and therefore if prayer be in itself a proper means, the end to be obtained by it, we may be assured, will not be had without *this*, any more than without any

other means, or necessary previous circumstances.”* Dr. Priestley may allege that this is not *absolute* predestination : but it is as absolute as ours, which makes equal provision for faith and holiness, and for every mean of salvation, as this does for prayer.

Will Dr. Priestley undertake to prove that *a loose, dissipated, and abandoned life, is a more general thing among the Calvinists, than among their opponents* ? I am persuaded he will not. He knows that the Calvinists in general are far from being a dissipated, or an abandoned people, and goes about to account for it ; and that in a way that *shall reflect no honour upon their principles*. “ Our moral conduct (he observes) is not left at the mercy of our opinions ; and the regard to virtue that is kept up by those who maintain the doctrines above-mentioned, is owing to the influence of other principles implanted in our nature.”† Admitting this to be true, yet one would think the worst principles will, *upon the whole*, be productive of the worst practices. They whose innate principles of virtue are all employed in counteracting the influence of a pernicious system, cannot be expected to form such amiable characters, as where those principles are not only left at liberty to operate, but are aided by a good system. It might, therefore, be expected, I say again, if our principles be what our opponents say they are, that a loose, dissipated, and abandoned life, would be a more general thing among us than among them.

I may be told, that the same thing, if put to us, would be found equally difficult ; or that, notwithstanding we contend for the superior influence of the Calvinistic system to that of Socinus, yet we should

* Let. to a Phil. Unb. Part i. p. 111.

† Consid. on Differ. of Opin. § iii.

find it difficult to prove, that a loose, dissipated, and abandoned life, is a more general thing among Socinians, than it is among Calvinists. And I allow that I am not sufficiently acquainted with the bulk of the people of that denomination to hazard an assertion of this nature. But if what is allowed by their own writers (who ought to know them) may be admitted as evidence, such an assertion might nevertheless be supported. "Rational christians are often represented (says Mr. Belsham) as indifferent to practical religion." Nor does he deny the justice of this representation, but admits, though with apparent reluctance, that "there has been some plausible ground for the accusation;" and goes about to account for it, as we have seen in Letter iv. in such a way, however, *as may reflect no dishonour upon their principles.*"* The same thing is acknowledged by Dr. Priestley, who allows, that "A great number of the Unitarians of the present age are only men of good sense, and without much practical religion:" and, that "there is a greater apparent conformity to the world in them, than is observable in others."† Yet he also goes about to account for these things as Mr. Belsham does, in such a way *as may reflect no dishonour on their principles.* It is rather extraordinary, that when facts are introduced in favour of the virtue of the general body of the Calvinists, they are not denied, but accounted for in such a way that their principles must share none of the honour; and when facts of an opposite kind are introduced in proof of the want of virtue in Unitarians, they also are not denied, but accounted for in such a way that their principles shall have none of the dishonour. Calvinism, it seems, must be immoral, though Calvinists

* Sermon, p. 32. † Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 100.

be virtuous ; and Socinianism must be amiable, though Socinians be vicious. I shall not inquire whether these very opposite methods of accounting for facts be fair or candid. On this the reader will form his own judgment: it is enough for me that the facts themselves are allowed.

If we look back to past ages (to say nothing of those who lived in the earliest periods of christianity, because I would refer to none but such as are allowed to have believed the doctrine in question) I think it cannot be fairly denied, that the great body of holy men, who have maintained the true worship of God (if there was any true worship of God maintained) during the Romish apostasy ; and who, many of them, sacrificed their earthly all for his name, have lived and died in the belief of the deity and atonement of Christ. Our opponents often speak of these doctrines being embraced by the apostate church of Rome ; but they say little of those, who during the long period of her usurpation, bore testimony for God. The *Waldenses*, who inhabited the vallies of Piedmont, and the *Albigenses*, who were afterwards scattered almost all over Europe, are allowed, I believe, on all hands, to have preserved the true religion in those darkest of times: and it is thought by some expositors, that these are the people who are spoken of in the twelfth chapter of the Revelation, under the representation of *a woman, to whom was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness—and there be nourished for a time, from the face of the serpent*. It was here that true religion was maintained, and sealed by the blood of thousands from age to age, when all the rest of the christian world were *wondering after the beast*. And as to the doctrines which they held, they were

much the same as ours. Among the adversaries to the church of Rome, it is true, there might be men of different opinions. Arius, and others, may be supposed to have had their followers in those ages. But the body of the people called *Waldenses*, are not to be reckoned as such; on the contrary, the principles which they professed were for substance the same with those embraced afterwards by the reformed churches; as is abundantly manifest by several of their catechisms and confessions of faith, which have been transmitted to our times.

Mr. Lindsey, in his *Apology*, has given a kind of history of those who have opposed the doctrine of the Trinity; but they make a poor figure during the above long and dark period, in which, if ever, a testimony for God was needed. He speaks of "churches and sects, as well as individuals of that description, in the XIIth century;" and there might be such. But can he produce any evidence of their having so much virtue as to make any considerable *sacrifices* for God? Whatever were their number, according to Mr. Lindsey's own account, from that time till the reformation (a period of three or four hundred years, and during which the *Waldenses* and the *Wickliffites* were sacrificing every thing for the preservation of a good conscience) they "were driven into corners, and silence."* That is, there is no testimony upon record which they bore, or any account of their having so much virtue in them as to oppose, at the expense of either life, liberty, or property, the prevailing religion of the times.

Mr. Lindsey speaks of the piety of "the famous *Abelard*;" but surely he must have been wretchedly driven for want of that important article, or he

* Chapter i. p. 34.

would not have ascribed it to a man, who, as a late writer observes, "could with equal facility explain Ezekiel's prophecies, and compose amorous sonnets for Heloise ; and was equally free to unfold the doctrine of the Trinity, and ruin the peace of a family, by debauching his patron's niece."* The same writer, in the *Appendix to his Farewell Sermon to the Congregation in Essex Street*, lately published, holds up the piety of *Servetus*, by giving us one of his prayers addressed to Jesus Christ ; in which he expresses his full persuasion that he was under a *divine impulse* to write against his proper divinity. Surely, if Socinian piety had not been very scarce, Mr. Lindsey would not have been under the necessity of exhibiting the effusions of idolatry and enthusiasm, as examples of it.

Religion will be allowed to have some influence in the forming of a *national* character : especially that of the common people, among whom, if any where, it generally prevails. Now if we look at those nations where Calvinism has been most prevalent, it will be found, I believe, that they have not been distinguished by their immorality, but the reverse, *Geneva*, the *Seven United States*, *Scotland*, and *North America*, (with the two last of which we may be rather better acquainted than with the rest) might be alleged as instances of this assertion. With respect to *Scotland*, though other sentiments are said to have lately gained ground with many of the clergy ; yet Calvinism is known to be generally prevalent among the serious part of the people. And as to their national character, you seldom know an intelligent Englishman to have visited that country, with-

* Mr. Robinson's Plea for the Divinity of Christ.

out being struck with the peculiar sobriety, and religious behaviour of the inhabitants. As to *America*, though strictly speaking, they may be said to have no national religion (a happy circumstance in their favour) yet perhaps there is no one nation in the world where Calvinism has more generally prevailed. The great body of the first settlers were Calvinists; and the far greater part of religious people among them, though of different denominations as to other matters, continue such to this day. And, as to the moral effects which their religious principles have produced, they are granted on all hands to be considerable. They are a people, as the *Monthly Reviewers* have acknowledged, “whose love of liberty is tempered with that of order and decency, and accompanied with the virtues of integrity, moderation, and sobriety. They know the necessity of regard to religion and virtue, both in principle and practice.”*

In each of these countries, it is true, as in all others, there are great numbers of irreligious individuals; perhaps a majority: but they have a greater proportion of religious characters than most other nations can boast; and the influence which these characters have upon the rest, is as that of a portion of leaven which leaveneth the whole lump.

The members of the church of England, it may be taken for granted, were generally Calvinists, as to their doctrinal sentiments, at, and for some time after, the Reformation. Since that time those sentiments have been growing out of repute, and Socinianism is supposed, among other principles, to have prevailed considerably among the members of that community. Dr. Priestley, however, is often very sanguine in estimating the great numbers of Unit-

* Monthly Review from May to August, 1793, p. 502.

rians among them. Now let it be considered, whether this change of principle has in any degree been serviceable to the interests of piety or virtue. On the contrary, did not a serious walking with God, and a rigid attention to morals, begin to die away from the time that the doctrines contained in the *thirty nine articles* began to be disregarded? * And now, when Socinianism is supposed to have made a greater progress than ever it did before, is there not a greater degree of *perjury*, and more *dissipation* of manners, that at almost any period since the reformation?

I am not insensible that it is the opinion of Dr. Priestley, and of some others, that men grow better, that the world advances considerably in moral improvement; nay, Mr. Belsham seems to favour an idea, that “in process of time, the earth may revert to its original paradisiacal state—and death itself be annihilated.” This however will hardly be thought to prove any thing, except that enthusiasm is not confined to Calvinists. And as to men growing better, whatever may be the moral improvement of the world in general, Dr. Priestley somewhere acknowledges, that this is far from being the case with the church of England, especially since the times of bishop Burnet.

With respect to the *dissenters*, were there ever men of holier lives than the generality of the *puritans* and *nonconformists* of the last two centuries? Can any thing, equal to their piety and devotedness to God, be found among the generality of the Socinians of their time, or of any time? In sufferings, in

* The same sort of people who held Calvinistic doctrines, were at the same time so severe in their morals, that *Laud* found it necessary, it seems, to publish, *The Book of Sports*, in order to counteract their influence on the nation at large.

fastings, in prayers, in a firm adherence to their principles, in a close walk with God in their families, and in a series of unremitted labours for the good of mankind, they spent their lives.

But *fastings* and *prayers*, perhaps, may not be admitted as excellences in their character. It is possible they may be treated with ridicule. Nothing less than this is attempted by Dr. Priestley in his Fifth Letter to Mr. Burn. "I could wish (says he) to quiet your fears on your account. For the many sleepless nights which your apprehensions must necessarily have caused you, accompanied of course with much earnest *prayer* and *fasting*, must in time affect your health." Candour out of the question, Is this *piety*?—It is said to be no uncommon thing for persons who have been used to pray extempore, when they have turned Socinians, to leave off that practice, and betake themselves to a written form of their own composition. This is formal enough, and will be thought by many to afford but slender evidence of their devotional spirit; but yet one would have supposed they would not have dared to ridicule it in others, however destitute of it they might be themselves.

Dr. Priestley allows that Unitarians are peculiarly wanting in *zeal* for religion.* That this concession is just, appears not only from the indifference of great numbers of them in private life, but from the conduct of many of their preachers. It has been observed, that when young ministers have become Socinians, they have frequently given up the ministry, and become school-masters, or any thing they could. Some, who have been possessed of fortunes, have become mere private gentlemen. Several such instances have occurred both among dissenters and churchmen. If

* Discourses on Various Subjects, pp. 94, 95.

they had true zeal for God and religion, why is it that they are so indifferent about preaching what they account the truth?

Dr. Priestley farther allows, that Calvinists have “less *apparent* conformity to the world; and that they *seem* to have more of a real principle of religion than Socinians.” But then he thinks the other have the most candour and benevolence; “so, as upon the whole, to approach nearest to the proper temper of christianity.” He “*hopes* also they have more of a real principle of religion than they *seem* to have.”* As to candour and benevolence, these will be considered in another Letter. At present it is sufficient to observe, that Dr. Priestley, like Mr. Belsham, on a change of character in his converts, is obliged to have recourse to *hope*, and to judge of things contrary to what they *appear* in the lives of men, in order to support the religious character of his party.

That a large proportion of serious people are to be found among Calvinists, Dr. Priestley will not deny; but Mrs. *Barbauld* goes farther. She acknowledges, in effect, that the seriousness which is to be found among Socinians themselves, is accompanied by a kind of secret attachment to our principles; an attachment which their preachers and writers, it seems, have hitherto laboured in vain to eradicate. “These doctrines (she says) it is true, among thinking people, are losing ground; but there is still apparent in that class called *serious christians*, a tenderness in exposing them; a sort of leaning towards them, as in walking over a precipice one should lean to the safest side: an idea that they are, if not true, at least good to be believed; and that a salutary error is better than a

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 100, 101.

dangerous truth.”* By the “class called serious christians,” Mrs. Barbauld cannot mean professed Calvinists ; for they have no notion of leaning towards any system as a system of salutary error, but consider that to which they are attached as being the truth. She must therefore intend to describe the serious part of the people of her own profession. We are much obliged to Mrs. Barbauld for this important piece of information. We might not so readily have known without it, that the hearts and consciences of the *serious part* of Socinians revolt at their own principles ; and that, though they have rejected what they esteem the great doctrines of the gospel in theory, yet they have an inward leaning towards them as the only safe ground on which to rest their hopes. According to this account it should seem, that *serious christians* are known by their predilection for Calvinistic doctrines ; and that those “*thinking people* among whom these doctrines are losing ground,” are not of that class or description, being distinguished from them. Well, it does not surprise us to hear, that “those men who are the most indifferent to practical religion, are the *first*, and serious christians the *last*, to embrace the rational system,” because it is no more than might be expected. If there be any thing surprising in the affair, it is, that those who make these acknowledgments should yet boast of their principles, on account of their moral tendency.

I am, &c.

* Remarks on Wakefield's Enquiry.

LETTER VII.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR TENDENCY
TO PROMOTE LOVE TO GOD.

Christian Brethren,

OUR opponents, as you have doubtless observed, are as bold in their assertions, as they are liberal in their accusations. Dr. Priestley not only asserts that the Calvinistic system is “unfavourable to genuine piety, but to *every branch of vital practical religion.*”* We have considered, in the foregoing Letter, what relates to morality and piety in general: in the following Letters we shall descend to particulars, and inquire, under the several specific virtues of christianity, which of the systems in question is the most unfavourable to them.

I begin with LOVE. The love of God and our neighbour, not only contains the sum of the moral law, but the spirit of true religion; it must therefore afford a strong presumption for, or against a system, as it is found to promote or diminish these cardinal virtues of the christian character. On both these topics we are principally engaged on the defensive, as our views of things stand charged with being unfavourable to the love of both God and man. “There is something in your system of christianity,” says Dr. Priestley in his *Letters to Mr. Burn*, “that debases the pure spirit of it, and does not consist with either the perfect veneration of the divine character, which is the foundation of true devotion to God; or perfect candour and benevolence to man.” A very serious charge, and which, could it be substantiated, would doubtless afford a strong presumption, if not more than presumption,

* Consider. on Differ. of Opinion, § III.

against us. But let the subject be examined. This Letter will be devoted to the first part of this heavy charge, and the following one to the last.

As to the question, whether we feel a veneration for the divine character? I should think we ourselves must be the best judges. All that Dr. Priestley can know of the matter is, that *he* could not feel a perfect veneration for a Being of such a character as we suppose the Almighty to sustain. That, however, may be true, and yet nothing result from it unfavourable to our principles. It is not impossible that Dr. Priestley should be of such a temper of mind as incapacitates him for admiring, venerating, or loving God in his true character; and hence he may be led to think, that all who entertain such and such ideas of God, must be void of that perfect veneration for him which he supposes himself to feel. The true character of God, as revealed in the scriptures, must be taken into the account, in determining whether our love to God be genuine or not. We may clothe the Divine Being with such attributes, and such only, as will suit our depraved taste; and then it will be no difficult thing to fall down and worship him: but this is not the love of God, but of an idol of our own creating.

The principal objections to the Calvinistic system, under this head, are taken from the four following topics: The *atonement*; the *vindictive* character of God; the *glory* of God, rather than the happiness of creatures, being his last end in creation; and the *worship* paid to Jesus Christ.

First, the doctrine of *atonement* as held by the Calvinists, is often represented by Dr. Priestley as detracting from the goodness of God, and as inconsistent with his *natural placability*.—He seems always to consider this doctrine as originating in the want of love, or at

least, of a sufficient degree of love ; as though God could not find in his heart to show mercy without a price being paid for it. “ Even the elect, (says he) according to their system, cannot be saved till the utmost effects of the divine wrath have been suffered for them by an innocent person.”* Mr. Jardine also, by the title which he has given to his late publication, calling it, *The unpurchased love of God, in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ* ; suggests the same idea. When our opponents wish to make good the charge of our ascribing a natural implacability to the Divine Being, it is common for them either to describe our sentiments in their own language ; or, if they deign to quote authorities, it is not from the sober discussions of prosaic writers, but from the figurative language of poetry. Mr. Belsham describes “ the formidable chimaera of our imagination, to which, (he says) we have annexed the name of *God the Father*, as a merciless tyrant.”† They conceive of “ God the Father,” says Mr. Lindsey, “ always with dread, as a Being of severe, unrelenting justice, revengeful, and inexorable, without full satisfaction made to him for the breach of his laws. God the Son, on the other hand, is looked upon as made up of all compassion and goodness, interposing to save men from the Father’s wrath, and subjecting himself to the extremest sufferings on that account.” For proof of this, we are referred to *the poetry of Dr. Watts* ! in which he speaks of *the rich drops of Jesus’ blood, that calm’d his frowning face ; that sprinkled o’er the burning throne, and turn’d the wrath to grace—of the*

* On Differ. of Opin. § iii.

† Sermons on the Importance of Truth, p. 33—35.

*infant Deity, the bleeding God, and of heaven appeased with flowing blood.**

On this subject, a Calvinist might without presumption adopt the language of our Lord to the Jews, *I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me.* Nothing can well be a greater misrepresentation of our sentiments than this which is constantly given. These writers cannot be ignorant, that Calvinists disavow considering the death of Christ as a *cause* of divine love or goodness. On the contrary, they always maintain, that divine love is the cause, the first cause of our salvation, and of the death of Christ to that end. They would not scruple to allow that God had love enough in his heart to save sinners without the death of his Son, had it been consistent with righteousness; but that, as receiving them to favour without some public expression of displeasure against their sin, would have been a dishonour to his government, and have afforded an encouragement for others to follow their example; *the love of God wrought in a way of righteousness*: first giving his only-begotten Son to become a sacrifice, and then pouring forth all the fulness of his heart through that appointed medium. The incapacity of God to show mercy without an atonement, is no other than that of a righteous governor, who, whatever good-will he may bear to an offender, cannot admit the thought of passing by the offence, without some public expression of his displeasure against it; that, while mercy triumphs, it may not be at the expense of law and equity, and of the general good.

So far as I understand it, this is the light in which Calvinists consider the subject. Now judge, brethren,

* Apology (4th Ed.) p. 97, and Appendix to his Farewell Sermon, at Essex-street, p. 52.

Whether this view of things represent the divine Being as *naturally implacable*? Whether the gift of Christ to die for us be not the strongest expression of the contrary? and, Whether this, or the system which it opposes, “give wrong impressions concerning the character and moral government of God?” Nay, I appeal to your own hearts, Whether that way of saving sinners through an atonement, in which mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other; in which God is *just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus*; do not endear his name to you more than any other representation of him that was ever presented to your minds? Were it possible for your souls to be saved in any other way, for the divine law to be relaxed, or its penalty remitted without respect to an atonement; would there not be a virtual reflection cast upon the divine character? Would it not appear as if God had enacted a law that was so rigorous as to require a repeal, and issued threatenings which he was obliged to retract? Or, at least, that he had formed a system of government without considering the circumstances in which his subjects would be involved; a system, “the strict execution of which would do more harm than good;” nay, as if the Almighty, on this account, were ashamed to maintain it, and yet had not virtue enough to acknowledge the remission to be an act of *justice*, but must all along call it by the name of *grace*? Would not the thought of such a reflection destroy the bliss of heaven, and stamp such an impression of *meanness* upon that character whom you are taught to adore, as would almost incapacitate you for revering or loving him?

It is farther objected, that, according to the Calvinistic system, God is *a vindictive Being*, and that

as such we cannot love him.—It is said, that we “represent God in such a light, that no earthly parent could imitate him without sustaining a character shocking to mankind.” That there is a mixture of the vindictive in the Calvinistic system, is allowed : but let it be closely considered, whether this be any disparagement to it ? Nay, rather, whether it be not necessary to its perfection ? The issue in this case entirely depends upon the question, Whether vindictive justice be in itself amiable ? If it be, it cannot render any system unamiable. “We are neither amused nor edified, (says a writer in the *Monthly Review*) by the coruscations of damnation. Nor can we by any means bring ourselves to think, with the late Mr. Edwards, that the vindictive justice of God is a glorious attribute.”* This however may be very true, and vindictive justice be a glorious attribute, notwithstanding.

I believe it is very common for people, when they speak of vindictive punishment, to mean that kind of punishment which is inflicted from a wrathful disposition, or a disposition to punish for the pleasure of punishing. Now, if this be the meaning of our opponents, we have no dispute with them. We do not suppose the Almighty to punish sinners for the sake of putting them to pain. Neither scripture, nor Calvinism, conveys any such idea. Vindictive punishment, as it is here defended, stands opposed to that punishment which is merely *corrective* : the one is exercised for the good of the party ; the other not so, but for the good of the community. Those who deny this last to be amiable in God, must found their denial either on scripture testimony, or on the nature and fitness of things. As to the *former*, the

* Rev. of Edwards’ XXXIII Sermons, for Mar. 1791.

scriptures will hardly be supposed to represent God as an unamiable Being ; if therefore they teach that vindictive justice is an unamiable attribute, it must be maintained that they never ascribe that attribute to God. But with what colour of evidence can this be alleged ? Surely, not from such language as the following : *The Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God—Our God is a consuming fire—God is jealous, and the Lord REVENGETH ; the Lord REVENGETH, and is furious ; the Lord will take VENGEANCE on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies—Who can stand before his indignation ? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger ?—His fury is poured out like fire—O Lord God, to whom VENGEANCE belongeth : O God, to whom VENGEANCE belongeth, shew thyself !—He that sheweth no mercy shall have judgment without mercy—He that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour—For we know him that hath said, VENGEANCE belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord—It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God—I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live forever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment, I will render VENGEANCE to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me—The angels which kept not their first estate, he hath reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day—Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire—The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking VENGEANCE on them that know not*

*God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

As to *the nature and fitness of things*, we cannot draw any conclusion from thence against the loveliness of vindictive justice, as a *divine* attribute, unless the thing itself can be proved to be unlovely. But this is contrary to the common sense and practice of mankind. There is no nation or people under heaven but what consider it in various cases as both necessary and lovely. It is true, they would despise and abhor a magistrate, who should punish beyond desert ; or who should avail himself of the laws of his country to gratify his own caprice, or his private revenge. This, however, is not vindictive justice, but manifest *injustice*. No considerate citizen who values the public weal, could blame a magistrate for putting the penal laws of his country so far in execution, as should be necessary for the true honour of good government, the support of good order, and the terror of wicked men. When the inhabitants of Gibeah requested, that the Levite might be brought out to them that they might *know him* ; and on their request not being granted, abused and murdered his companion ; all Israel, as one man, not only condemned the action, but called upon the Benjamites to deliver up the criminals to justice. Had the Benjamites complied with their request, and had those sons of Belial been put to death, not for their own good, but for the good of the community, where had been the unloveliness of the procedure ? On the contrary, such a conduct must have recommended itself to the heart of every friend of righteousness in the

* Deut. iv. 24. . Heb. xii. 29. Nahum i. 2, 6. Psalm xciv. 1. James ii. 13. Isa. xxvii. 11. Heb. x. 30, 31. Deut. xxxii/40, 41. Jude 6, 7. 2 Thes. i. 8.

universe, as well as have prevented the shocking effusion of blood which followed their refusal. Now, if vindictive justice may be glorious in a human government, there is no reason to be drawn from *the nature and fitness of things*, why it would not be the same in the divine administration.

But the idea on which our opponents love principally to dwell, is that of a *father*. Hence the charge, that we “represent God in such a light that no earthly parent could imitate him, without sustaining a character shocking to mankind.” This objection comes with an ill grace from Dr. Priestley; who teaches, that “God is the author of sin; and may do evil, provided it be with a view that good may come.”* Is not this representing God in such a light, that no one could imitate him without sustaining a character shocking to mankind? Whether Dr. Priestley’s notions on this subject be true, or not, it is true that God’s ways are so much above ours, that it is unjust in many cases to measure his conduct to a rebellious world, by that of a father to his children.

In this matter, however, God is imitable. We have seen already that a good magistrate, who may justly be called the *father* of his people, ought not to be under the influence of blind affection, so as in any case to shew mercy at the expense of the public good. Nor is this all: There are cases in which a parent has been obliged, in benevolence to his family, and from a concern for the general good, to give up a stubborn and rebellious son, to bring him forth with his own hands to the elders of his city, and there with his own lips bear witness against him; such witness too as would subject him not to a mere salutary correction, but to be stoned to death by the men of his city. We know such a law

* On Necessity, p. 117—121.

was made in Israel ;* and as a late writer observed upon it, such a law “was wise and good ;”† it was calculated to enforce in parents an early and careful education of their children ; and if, in any instance, it was executed, it was *that all Israel might hear and fear !* And how do we know but that it may be consistent with the good of the whole system, yea, necessary to it, that some of the rebellious sons of men, should, in company with apostate angels, be made *examples* of divine vengeance ; that they should stand, like Lot’s wife, as *pillars of salt*, or as everlasting monuments of God’s displeasure against sin ; and that while their smoke riseth up forever and ever, all the intelligent universe should *hear and fear, and do no more so wickedly !* Indeed, we must not only know, that this *may* be the case, but if we pay any regard to the authority of scripture, that it *is* so. If words have any meaning, this is the idea given us of the *Angels who kept not their first estate* ; and of the inhabitants of *Sodom and Gomorrha* ; who are said to be *set forth FOR AN EXAMPLE, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*‡

It belongs to the character of an all-perfect Being, who is the moral governor of the universe, to promote the good of the whole ; but there may be cases, as in human governments, wherein the general good may be inconsistent with the happiness of particular parts. The case of robbers, of murderers, or of traitors, whose lives are sacrificed for the good of society, that the example of terror afforded by their death may counteract the example of immorality exhibited by their life, is no deduction from the benevolence of a government, but rather essential to it.

* Deut. xxi. 18—21.

† Mr. Robinson, in his Sermon to the Young People at Willingham.

‡ Jude 6, 7.

But how, after all, can we *love* such a tremendous Being? I answer, a capacity to resent an injury is not always considered as a blemish even in a *private character*: if it be governed by justice and aimed at the correction of evil, it is generally allowed to be commendable. We do not esteem the favour of a man if we consider him as incapable, on any occasion, of resentment. We should call him an easy soul, who is kind, merely because he has not sense enough to feel an insult. But shall we allow it right and fit for a puny mortal thus far to know his own worth, and assert it; and at the same time deny it to the great Supreme, and plead for his being insulted with impunity?

God, however, in the punishment of sin, is not to be considered as acting in a merely *private capacity*, but as the universal moral governor; not as separate from the great system of Being, but as connected with it; or as head and guardian of it. Now in this relation, vindictive justice is not only consistent with the loveliness of his character, but essential to it. Capacity and inclination to punish a disorder in a state, are never thought to render an earthly prince less lovely in the eyes of his loyal and faithful subjects, but more so. That temper of mind, on the contrary, which should induce him to connive at rebellion, however it might go by the name of benevolence and mercy, would be accounted by all the friends of good government, injustice to the public; and those who in such cases side with the disaffected, and plead their cause, are generally supposed to be tainted with disaffection themselves.

A third objection is taken from the consideration of *the glory of God*, rather than the happiness of creatures being his last end in creation.—“Those who assume to themselves the distinguishing title of orthodox, (says Dr. Priestley,) consider the supreme Being as having

created all things *for his glory*, and by no means for the general happiness of all his creatures."* If by the general happiness of *all* his creatures, Dr. Priestley means, the general good of the universe, nothing can be more unfair than this representation. Those who are called orthodox never consider the glory of God as being at variance with the happiness of creation in general, nor with that of any part of it, except those who have revolted from the divine government: nor, if we regard the intervention of a mediator, with theirs, unless they prove finally impenitent, or, as Dr. Priestley calls them, "wilful and obstinate transgressors." The glory of God *consists*, with reference to the present case, in doing that which is best upon the whole. But if, by the general happiness of *all* his creatures, he means to include the happiness of those angels who kept not their first estate, and of those men who die impenitent; it is acknowledged, that what is called the orthodox system does by no means consider this as an end in creation, either supreme or subordinate. To suppose that the happiness of *all* creatures, whatever might be their future conduct, was God's ultimate end in creation, (unless we could imagine him to be disappointed with respect to the grand end he had in view) is to suppose what is contrary to *fact*. All creatures we are certain are not happy in this world; and, if any regard is to be paid to revelation, all will not be happy in the next.

If it be alleged, that a portion of misery is necessary in order to relish happiness; that therefore the miseries of the present life, upon the whole, are blessings: and that the miseries threatened in the life to come may be of the same nature, designed as a purgation, by means of which, sinners will at length escape the

* On Differ. of Opin. § iii.

second death—It is replied, All the miseries of this world are not represented as blessings to the parties, nor even all the good things of it. The drowning of Pharaoh, for instance, is never described as a blessing to him; and God declared that he had *cursed the blessings* of the wicked priests, in the days of the prophet Malachi. *All things*, we are assured, *work together for good*; but this is confined to those who love God, and are the called according to his purpose. As to the life to come, if the miseries belonging to that state be merely temporary and purgative, there must be all along a mixture of love and mercy in them; whereas the language of scripture is, *He that hath shewed no mercy, shall have judgment WITHOUT MERCY—The wine of the wrath of God will be poured out WITHOUT MIXTURE*. Nay, such miseries must not only contain a mixture of love and mercy, but they themselves must be the effects and expressions of love; and then it will follow, that the foregoing language of limitation and distinction (which is found indeed throughout the Bible) is of no account; and that blessings and curses are the same things. Dr. Priestley himself speaks of “the laws of God as being guarded with awful sanctions;” and says, that “God will inflexibly punish all wilful and obstinate transgressors.”* But how can that be called an *awful* sanction which only subjects a man to such misery as is necessary for his good? How, at least, can that be accounted *inflexible* punishment in which the divine Being all along aims at the sinner’s happiness? We might as well call the operation of a surgeon in amputating a mortified limb, in order to save the patient’s life, by the name of inflexible punishment, as those miseries which are intended for the good of the sinner. If that be their end, they are, strictly speaking,

* On Diff. of Opin. § iii.

blessings, though blessings in disguise : and in that case, as Dr. Edwards in his answer to Dr. Chauncey has fully proved, blessings and curses are in effect the same things.

As to our considering the Supreme Being as having created all things for his own glory, I hope it will be allowed that the scriptures *seem*, at least, to countenance such an idea. They teach us that *God made all things FOR HIMSELF*—that *all things are created by him, and FOR HIM*. He is expressly said to have created Israel (and, if Israel, why not others ?) *FOR HIS GLORY*. Not only *of him, and through him, but, TO HIM are all things*. Glory, and honour, and power, are ascribed to him, by the elders and the living creatures ; for, say they, *Thou hast created all things ; and for THY PLEASURE they are and were created.**

But farther, and what is more immediately to the point, I hope this sentiment will not be alleged as a proof of our want of *love to God* ; for it is only assigning him the supreme place in the system of being ; and Dr. Priestley himself elsewhere speaks of “the love of God, and a regard to his glory,” as the same thing.† One should think those, on the other hand, who assign the happiness of creatures as God’s ultimate end, thereby giving him only a subordinate place in the system, could not allege this as an evidence of their love to him. That place which God holds in the great system of being, he ought to hold in our affections ; for we are not required to love him in a greater proportion than the place which he occupies requires. If it were otherwise, our affections must move in a preposterous direction. We ought, therefore, on this sup-

* Prov. xvi. 4. Col. i. 16. Isai. xliii. 7. Heb. ii. 10.

Rom. xi. 36. Rev. iv. 11.

† On differ. of Opin. § i.

position, to love ourselves, our own happiness, and the happiness of our fellow-creatures, *more* than God; for God himself is supposed to do the same. But, if so, the great rule of human actions should have been different. Instead of requiring love to God in the *first* place, with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and *then* love to ourselves, and our neighbours; it should have been reversed. The song of the angels, too, instead of beginning with *Glory to God in the highest*, and ending with *peace on earth, and good will to men*; should have placed the last first, and the first last. How such a view of things can tend to promote *the love of God*, unless a subordinate place in our affections be higher than the supreme, it is difficult to conceive.

The Great God who fills heaven and earth must be allowed to form the far greatest proportion, if I may so speak, of the whole system of being; for compared with him, *all nations*, yea, all worlds, *are but as a drop of a bucket, or as the small dust of the balance*. He is the source and continual support of existence in all its varied forms. As the great guardian of being in general, therefore, it is fit and right, that he should in the first place guard the glory of his own character and government. Nor can this be to the disadvantage of the universe, but the contrary; as will appear if it be considered, that it is the glory of God to do that which shall be best upon the whole. The glory of God therefore connects with it the general good of the created system, and of all its parts, except those whose welfare clashes with the welfare of the whole.

If it were otherwise, if the happiness of *all* creatures were the great end that God from the beginning had in view, then doubtless, in order that this end might be accomplished, every thing else must, as occasion re-

quired, give way to it. The glory of his own character, occupying only a subordinate place in the system, if ever it should stand in the way of that which is supreme, must give place among other things. And if God have consented to all this, it must be because the happiness, not only of creation in general, but of every individual, is an object of the greatest magnitude, and most fit to be chosen : that is, it is better, and more worthy of God, as the governor of the universe, to give up his character for purity, equity, wisdom, and veracity, and to become vile and contemptible in the eyes of his creatures ; it is better that the bands which bind all holy intelligencies to him should be broken, and the cords which hold together the whole moral system be cast away, than that the happiness of a creature should in any instance be given up ! Judge, ye friends of God, does this consist with “ the most perfect veneration for the divine character ? ”

Once more : It seems to be generally supposed by our opponents, that *the worship we pay to Christ* tends to divide our hearts ; and that in proportion as we adore him, we detract from the essential glory of the Father. In this view, therefore, they reckon themselves to exercise a greater veneration for God than we. But it is worthy of notice, and particularly the serious notice of our opponents, that it is no new thing for an opposition to Christ to be carried on under the plea of *love to God*. This was the very plea of the Jews when they took up stones to stone him. *For a good work*, said they, *we stone thee not, but for that thou, being a man, makest thyself God*. They very much prided themselves in their GOD ; and under the influence of that spirit constantly rejected the Lord Jesus. *Thou art called a Jew, and makest thy boast of God—We be not born of fornication ; we have one Father, even God*

—Give GOD the praise, we know that this man is a sinner. It was under the pretext of zeal and friendship for GOD, that they at last put him to death as a blasphemer. But what kind of zeal was this; and in what manner did Jesus treat it? *If GOD were your Father*, said he, *ye would love me—He that is of GOD, heareth GOD's words—It is my Father that honoureth me, of whom ye say that he is your GOD; yet ye have not known him—I know you, that you have not the love of GOD in you.**

Again: The primitive christians will be allowed to have loved God aright; yet they worshipped Jesus Christ. Not only did the martyr Stephen close his life by committing his departing spirit into the hands of Jesus, but it was the common practice in primitive times to invoke his name. He hath authority, said Ananias concerning Saul, to bind *all that call on thy name*. One part of the christian mission was to declare, That whosoever should *call on the name of the Lord* should be saved; even of that Lord of whom the Gentiles had not heard. Paul addressed himself to *all that in every place called upon the name of Jesus Christ*. These modes of expression (which if I be not greatly mistaken, always signify divine worship) plainly inform us, that it was not merely the practice of a few individuals, but of the great body of the primitive christians, to invoke the name of Christ; nay, and that this was a mark by which they were distinguished as *christians*.†

Farther: It ought to be considered, that in worshipping the Son of God, we worship him not on ac-

* Rom ii. 17. John x. 33, viii. 41. ix. 24. viii. 42, 47, 54, 55. v. 42.

† Acts ix. 14. compared with Ver. 17. Rom. x. 11—14. 1 Cor. i. 2.

count of that wherein he differs from the Father ; but on account of those perfections which we believe him to possess in common with him. This, with the consideration that we worship him not to the exclusion of the Father, any more than the Father to the exclusion of him, but as *one with him*, removes all apprehensions from our minds, that in ascribing glory to the one, we detract from that of the other. Nor can we think, but that these ideas are confirmed, and the weight of the objection removed, by those declarations of scripture where the Father and the Son are represented as being in such union, that *he who hath seen the one, hath seen the other ; and he who honoureth the one, honoureth the other ; yea, that he who honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who sent him.**

It might fairly be argued in favour of the tendency of Calvinistic doctrines to promote the love of God, that upon those principles we have *more to love him for*, than upon the other. On this system we have *much* to be forgiven, and therefore love much. The *expense* at which our salvation has been obtained, as we believe, furnishes us with a motive of love to which nothing can be compared. But this I shall refer to another place ;† and conclude with reminding you, that notwithstanding Dr. Priestley loads Calvinistic principles with such heavy charges as those mention-

* John xiv. 7—9. v. 23. The reader may see this subject ably urged by *Mr. Scott*, in his *Essays on the most important Subjects of religion*, First edition, No. vii. p. 96, 97. These *Essays* are of a piece with the other productions of that judicious writer ; and, though small, and for the convenience of the poor, sold for *one penny* each, contain a fund of solid, rational, and scriptural divinity.

† Letter xiv.

ed at the beginning of this Letter, yet he elsewhere acknowledges them to be “generally favourable to that leading virtue, devotion;” which in effect is acknowledging them to be favourable to *the love of God*.

I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

ON CANDOUR AND BENEVOLENCE TO MEN.

Christian Brethren,

YOU recollect that the Calvinistic system stands charged by Dr. Priestley, not only with being inconsistent with a perfect veneration of the divine character, but with “perfect candour and benevolence to man.”

This, it must be owned, has often been objected to the Calvinists. Their views of things have been supposed to render them sour and ill-natured towards those who differ from them. Charity, candour, benevolence, liberality, and the like, are virtues to which Socinians, on the other hand, lay almost an exclusive claim. And such a weight do they give these virtues in the scale of morality, that they conceive themselves, “upon the whole, even allowing that they have more of an apparent conformity to the world than the Trinitarians, to approach nearer to the proper temper of christianity than they.”*

I shall not go about to vindicate Calvinists any farther than I conceive their spirit and conduct to admit of a fair vindication; but I am satisfied that if things be closely examined, it will be found that a

* Dr. Priestley's Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 100.

great deal of what our opponents attribute to themselves is not benevolence or candour; and that a great deal of what they attribute to us, is not owing to the want of either.

Respecting *benevolence* or *good-will to men*, in order to be genuine, they must consist with love to God. There is such a thing as *partiality* to men, with respect to the points in which they and their Maker are at variance; but this is not benevolence. Partiality to a criminal at the bar might induce us to pity him so far as to plead in extenuation of his guilt, and to endeavour to bring him off from the just punishment of the laws; but this would not be benevolence. There must be a *rectitude* in our actions and affections to render them truly virtuous. Regard to the public good must keep pace with compassion to the miserable; else the latter will degenerate into vice, and lead us to be *partakers of other men's sins*. Whatever pretence be made to devotion, or love to God, we never admit them to be real, unless accompanied with love to men; neither ought any pretence of love to men to be admitted as genuine, unless it be accompanied with love to God. Each of these virtues is considered in the scriptures as an evidence of the other. *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar—By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.**

There is such a thing as *partiality* to men, as observed before, with respect to the points in which they and their Maker are at variance; leaning to those notions that represent their sin as comparatively little, and their repentance and obedience as a balance against it; speaking smooth things, and

affording flattering intimations that without an atonement, nay, even without repentance in this life, all will be well at last. But if it should prove, that God is wholly in the right, and man wholly in the wrong : that sin is exceeding sinful : that we all deserve to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord ; and that, if we be not interested in the atonement of Christ, this punishment must actually take place ;—if these things, I say, should at last prove true, then all such notions as have flattered the pride of men, and cherished their presumption, instead of being honoured with the epithets of liberal and benevolent, will be called by very different names. The princes and people of Judah would doubtless be apt to think the sentiments taught by *Hananiah*, who prophesied smooth things concerning them, much more benevolent and liberal than those of *Jeremiah*, (ch. 28.) who generally came with heavy tidings ; yet true benevolence existed only in the latter. Whether the complexion of the whole system of our opponents do not resemble that of the false prophets, who *prophesied smooth things, and healed the hurt of the daughter of Israel slightly, crying, peace, peace, when there was no peace* ; and whether their objections to our views of things be not the same for substance as might have been made to the true prophets, let all who wish to know the truth, however ungrateful it may be to flesh and blood, decide.

A great deal of what is called *candour* and *benevolence* among Socinians, is nothing else but *indifference to all religious principle*. “ If we could be so happy, (says Dr. Priestley) as to believe that there are no errors, but what men may be so circumstanced as to be *innocently* betrayed into ; that any mistake of the

head is very consistent with rectitude of heart ; and that all differences in modes of worship may be only the different methods by which different men (who are equally *the offspring of God*) are endeavouring to honour and obey their common parent ; our differences of opinion would have no tendency to lessen our mutual love and esteem.”* This is manifestly no other than indifference to all religious principle. Such an indifference, it is allowed, would produce a temper of mind which Dr. Priestley calls candour and benevolence ; but which, in fact, is neither the one, nor the other. Benevolence is *good will to men* ; but good will to men is very distinct from a good opinion of their principles, or their practices ; so distinct, that the former may exist in all its force, without the least degree of the latter. Our Lord thought very ill of the principles and practices of the people of Jerusalem ; yet he *beheld the city, and wept over it*. This was genuine benevolence.

Benevolence is a very distinct thing from *complacency* or *esteem*. These are founded on an approbation of character ; the other is not. I am bound by the law of love to bear good will to men, as creatures of God, and as fellow-creatures, so as by every mean in my power to promote their welfare, both as to this life, and that which is to come ; and all this, let their character be what it may. I am also bound to *esteem* every person, for that in him which is truly amiable, be he a friend or an enemy, and to put the best construction upon his actions that truth will admit ; but no law obliges me to esteem a person respecting those things which I have reason to consider as erroneous or vicious. I may pity him, and ought to do so ; but to esteem him in those respects would be contrary

* On Dif. of Opin. § ii.

to the love of both God and man. Indifference to religious principle, it is acknowledged, will promote such esteem. Under the influence of that indifference we may form a good opinion of various characters, which otherwise we should not do ; but the question is, Would that esteem be right, or amiable ? On the contrary, if religious principle of any kind should be found necessary to salvation ; and if benevolence consist in that good-will to men, which leads us to promote their real welfare, it must contradict it ; for the welfare of men is promoted by thinking and speaking the truth concerning them. I might say, If we could be so happy as to think virtue and vice indifferent things, we should then possess a far greater degree of esteem for some men than we now do ; but would such a kind of esteem be right, or of any use either to ourselves or them ?

Candour, as it relates to the treatment of an adversary, is that temper of mind which will induce us to treat him openly, fairly, and ingenuously ; granting him every thing that can be granted consistent with truth, and entertaining the most favourable opinion of his character and conduct that justice will admit. But what has all this to do with indifference to religious principle, as to matters of salvation ? Is there no such thing as treating a person with fairness, openness, and generosity, while we entertain a very ill opinion of his principles, and have the most painful apprehensions as to the danger of his state ? Let our opponents name a more candid writer of controversy than President Edwards : yet he considered many of the sentiments against which he wrote, as destructive to the souls of men, and those who held them as being in a dangerous situation.

As a great deal of what is called candour and benevolence, among Socinians, is merely the effect of indiffer-

ence to religious principle ; so a great deal of that in Calvinists, for which they are accused of the want of these virtues, is no other than *a serious attachment to what they account divine truth, and a serious disapprobation of sentiments which they deem subversive of it.* Now, surely, neither of these things is inconsistent with either candour or benevolence : if they be, however, Jesus Christ and his apostles are involved in the guilt, equally with the Calvinists. They cultivated such an attachment to religious principle, as to be in real earnest in the promotion of it ; and constantly represented the knowledge and belief of it as necessary to eternal life. *Ye shall know the truth, said Christ, and the truth shall make you free—This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent—He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life ; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.** They also constantly discovered a marked disapprobation of those sentiments which tended to introduce *another gospel*, so far as to declare that man accursed who should propagate them. They considered false principles as pernicious and destructive to the souls of men. *If ye believe not that I am he, said Christ to the Jews, ye shall die in your sins—and whither I go ye cannot come.* To the Galatians, who did not fully reject christianity, but in the matter of justification were for uniting the works of the law with the grace of the gospel, Paul testified, saying, *If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.†*

Had the apostle Paul considered “all the different modes of worship as what might be only the different methods of different men, endeavouring to honour and obey their common parent ;” he would not have felt his

* John viii. 32. xvii. 3. iii. 36.

† John viii. 21—24. Gal. i. 8. v. 2, 3, 4.

spirit stirred in him, when he saw the city of Athens wholly given to idolatry : at least, he would not have addressed idolaters in such strong language as he did, *preaching to them that they should turn from these vanities unto the living God*. Paul considered them as having been all their life employed, not in worshipping the living God, only in a mode different from others, but *mere vanities*. Nor did he consider it as a “mere mistake of the head, into which they “might have been innocently betrayed ;” but as a *sin*, for which they were *without excuse* ; a *sin* for which he called upon them in the name of the living God to *repent*.*

Now, if candour and benevolence be christian virtues, which they doubtless are, one should think they must consist with the practice of Christ and his apostles. But if this be allowed, the main ground on which Calvinists are censured will be removed ; and the candour for which their opponents plead must appear to be spurious, and foreign to the genuine spirit of christianity.

Candour and benevolence, as christian virtues, must also consist with each other ; but the candour of Socinians is destructive of benevolence, as exemplified in the scriptures. Benevolence in Christ and his apostles extended not merely, nor mainly, to the bodies of men, but to their souls ; nor did they think so favourably of mankind as to desist from warning and alarming them, but the reverse. They viewed the whole world as *lying in wickedness*, in a perishing condition ; and hazarded the loss of every earthly enjoyment to rescue them from it, as from the jaws of destruction. But it is easy to perceive, that in proportion to the influence of Socinian candour upon us, we shall consider mankind, even the heathens, as a race of virtuous beings, all worshipping the great Father of creation, only in different modes.

* Acts xvii. 16. xiv. 15. Rom. i. 20. Acts xvii. 30.

Our concern for their salvation will consequently abate, and we shall become so indifferent respecting it, as never to take any considerable pains for their conversion. This, indeed, is the very truth with regard to Socinians. They discover, in general, no manner of concern for the salvation of either heathens abroad, or profligates at home. Their candour supplies the place of this species of benevolence, and not unfrequently excites a scornful smile at the conduct of those who exercise it.

The difference between our circumstances and those of Christ and his apostles, who were divinely inspired, however much it ought to deter us from passing judgment upon the hearts of individuals; ought not to make us think that every mode of worship is equally safe, or that religious principle is indifferent as to the affairs of salvation; for this would be to consider as false, what by divine inspiration they taught as true.

Let us come to matters of fact. Mr. Belsham does not deny that Calvinists may be "pious, candid, and benevolent;" but he thinks they would have been *more so* if they had been Socinians. "They, and there are many such, (says he) who are sincerely pious, and diffusively benevolent *with* these principles, could not have failed to have been much *better*, and much happier, had they adopted a milder, a more rational, a more truly evangelical creed."* Now, if this be indeed the case, one might expect that the most perfect examples of these virtues are not to be looked for among us, but among our opponents; and yet it may be questioned whether they will pretend to more perfect examples of piety, candour, or benevolence, than are to be found in the characters of a HALE, a FRANCK, a BRAINERD, an EDWARDS, a WHITEFIELD, a THORNTON, and a HOWARD, (to say nothing of the living) whose lives

* Sermon on the Importance of Truth, p. 30.

were spent in doing good to the souls and bodies of men ; and who lived and died depending on the atoning blood and justifying righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The last of these great men, in whom his country glories, and who is justly considered as *the martyr of humanity*, is said thus to have expressed himself at the close of his last Will and Testament : “ My immortal spirit I cast on the sovereign mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of my strength, and I trust is become my salvation.” He is said also to have given orders for a plain neat stone to be placed upon his grave, with this inscription, *Spes mea Christus : CHRIST IS MY HOPE !*

We are often reminded of the persecuting spirit of Trinitarians, and particularly of Calvin toward Servetus. This example has been long held up by our opponents, not only as a proof of his cruel disposition, and odious character, but as if it were sufficient to determine, what must be the turn and spirit of Calvinists in general. But supposing the case to which they appeal were allowed to prove the cruelty of Calvin’s disposition ; nay, that he was, on the whole, a wicked man, destitute both of religion and humanity ; What would all this prove as to the tendency of the system that happened to be called after his name, but which is allowed to have existed long before he was born ? We regard what no man did or taught as oracular, unless he could prove himself divinely inspired, to which Calvin never pretended. Far be it from us to vindicate him, or any other man, in the business of persecution. We abhor every thing of the kind as much as our opponents. Though the principles for which he contended appear to us, in the main, to be just ; yet the weapons of his warfare, in this instance, were carnal.

It ought, however, to be acknowledged on the other side, and if our opponents possessed all the candour to which they pretend, they would in this, as well as in other cases, acknowledge, that persecution for religious principles was not at that time peculiar to any party of christians, but common to all; whenever they were invested with civil power. It was an error, and a detestable one; but it was the error of the age. They looked upon heresy in the same light as we look upon those crimes which are inimical to the peace of civil society; and, accordingly, proceeded to punish heretics by the sword of the civil magistrate. If Socinians did not persecute their adversaries so much as Trinitarians, it was because they were not equally invested with the power of doing so. Mr. Lindsey acknowledges that *Faustus Socinus* himself was not free from persecution in the case of *Francis Davides*, superintendent of the Unitarian churches in Transylvania. Davides had disputed with Socinus on the invocation of Christ, and “died in prison in consequence of his opinion, and some offence taken at his supposed indiscreet propagation of it from the pulpit. I wish I could say, (adds Mr. Lindsey) that Socinus, or his friend Blandrata, had done all in their power to prevent his commitment, or procure his release afterwards.”—The difference between Socinus and Davides was very slight. They both held Christ to be a mere man. The former, however, was for praying to him; which the latter, with much greater consistency, disapproved. Considering this, the persecution to which Socinus was accessory was as great as that of Calvin; and there is no reason to think but that if Davides had differed as much from Socinus as Servetus did from Calvin, and if the civil magistrates had been for burning him, Socinus would have concurred with them. To this might he added, that the con-

duct of Socinus was marked with *disingenuity* ; in that he considered the opinion of Davides in no very heinous point of light ; but was afraid of increasing the odium, under which he and his party already lay, among other christian churches.*

Mr. Robinson, in his *Ecclesiastical Researches*, has given an account of both these persecutions ; but it is easy to perceive the prejudice under which he wrote. He evidently inclines to extenuate the conduct of Socinus, while he includes every possible circumstance that can in any manner blacken the memory of Calvin. Whatever regard we may bear to the latter, I am persuaded we should not wish to extenuate his conduct in the persecution of Servetus ; or to represent it in softer terms, nor yet so soft, as Mr. Robinson has represented that of the former in the persecution of Davides.

We do not accuse Socinianism of being a persecuting system, on account of this instance of misconduct in *Socinus* : nor is it any proof of the superior candour of our opponents, that they are continually acting the very reverse towards us. As a *Baptist*, I might indulge resentment against *Cranmer*, who caused some of that denomination to be burned alive : yet I am inclined to think, from all that I have read of *Cranmer*, that notwithstanding his conduct in those instances, he was upon the whole of an amiable disposition. Though he held with Pedobaptism, and in this manner defended it, yet I should never think of imputing a spirit of persecution to Pedobaptists in general ; or of charging their sentiment, in that particular, with being of a persecuting tendency. It was the opinion that *erroneous, religious principles are punishable by the civil magistrate*, that did the mischief, whether at Geneva, in Transylvania, or in Britain ; and to this, rather than to

* Mr. Lindsey's Apol. p. 153—156.

Trinitarianism, or to Unitarianism, it ought to be imputed.

We need not hold with Mr. Lindsey, "the innocence of error," in order to shun a spirit of persecution. Though we conceive of error, in many cases, as criminal in the sight of God, and as requiring admonition, yea, exclusion from a *religious* society; yet, while we reject all ideas of its exposing a person to *civil* punishment, or inconvenience, we ought to be acquitted of the charge of persecution. Where the majority of a religious society consider the avowed principles of an individual of that society as being fundamentally erroneous, and inconsistent with the united worship and well-being of the whole; it cannot be persecution to endeavour by scriptural arguments to convince him; and, if that cannot be accomplished, to exclude him from their communion.

It has been suggested, that to think the worse of a person on account of his sentiments, is a species of persecution, and indicates a spirit of bitterness at the bottom, which is inconsistent with that benevolence which is due to all mankind. But if it be persecution to think the worse of a person, on account of his sentiments (unless no man be better or worse, whatever sentiments he imbibes, which very few will care to assert) then it must be persecution for us to think of one another according to truth. It is also a species of persecution, of which our opponents are guilty as well as we, whenever they maintain the superior moral tendency of their own system. That which is adapted and intended to do good to the party, cannot be persecution, but genuine benevolence. Let us suppose a number of travellers, all proposing to journey to one place. A number of different ways present themselves to view, and each appears to be the right

way. Some are inclined to one, some to another ; and some contend that, whatever smaller difference there may be between them, they all lead to the same end. Others, however, are persuaded that they all do *not* terminate in the same end ; and appeal to a correct map of the country, which points out a number of bye-paths, resembling those in question, each leading to a fatal issue. Query, Would it be the part of benevolence, in this case, for the latter to keep silence, and hope the best ; or to state the evidence on which their apprehensions were founded, and to warn their fellow-travellers of their danger ?

There are, it is acknowledged, many instances of a want of candour and benevolence among us ; over which it becomes us to lament. This is the case especially with those whom Dr. Priestley is pleased to call “the only consistent absolute Predestinarians.” I may add, there has been, in my opinion, a great deal too much haughtiness and uncandidness discovered by some of the Trinitarians of the *established church*, in their controversies with Socinian dissenters. These dispositions, however, do not belong to them as Trinitarians, but as churchmen. A slight observation of human nature will convince us, that the adherents to a religion established by law, let their sentiments be what they may, will always be under a powerful temptation to take it for granted that they are right, and that all who dissent from them are contemptible sectaries, unworthy of a candid and respectful treatment. This temptation, it is true, will not have equal effect upon all in the same community. Serious and humble characters will watch against it ; and, being wise enough to know that real worth is not derived from any thing merely external, they may be

superior to it. But those of another description will be very differently affected.

There is, indeed, a mixture of evil passions in all our religious affections, against which it becomes us to watch and pray. I see many things in those of my own sentiments which I cannot approve; and, possibly, others may see the same in me. And should the Socinians pretend to the contrary, with respect to themselves, or aspire at a superiority to their neighbours, it may be more than they are able to maintain. It cannot escape the observation of thinking and impartial men, that the candour of which they so frequently boast, is pretty much confined to their own party, or those that are near a-kin to them. Socinians can be candid to Arians, and Arians to Socinians, and each of them to deists; but if Calvinists expect a share of their tenderness, let them not greatly wonder if they be disappointed. There need not be a greater or a more standing proof of this, than the manner in which the writings of the latter are treated in the *Monthly Review*.

It has been frequently observed, that though Socinian writers plead so much for candour and esteem among professing christians, yet, generally speaking, there is such a mixture of scornful contempt discovered towards their opponents, as renders their professions far from consistent. Mr. *Lindsey* very charitably accounts for our errors, by asserting that “the doctrine of Christ being possessed of two natures, is the fiction of ingenious men, *determined at all events to believe Christ to be a different Being from what he really was, and uniformly declared himself to be*; by which fiction of theirs they elude the plainest declarations of scripture concerning him, and *will prove him to be the most high God, in spite of his own*

most express and constant language to the contrary. And as there is no reasoning with such persons, they are to be pitied, and considered as being under a debility of mind in this respect, however sensible and rational in others.”* Would Mr. Lindsey wish to have this considered as a specimen of Socinian candour? If Mrs. *Barbauld* had been possessed of candour equal to her ingenuity, instead of supposing that Calvinists derive their ideas of election, the atonement, future punishment, &c. from the tyranny and caprice of an eastern despot, she might have admitted, whether they were right or not, that those principles appeared to them to be taught in the Bible.†

If we may estimate the candour of Socinians, from the spirit discovered by Mr. *Robinson* in the latter part of his life, the conclusion will not be very favourable to their system. At the time when this writer professed himself a Calvinist, he could acknowledge those who differed from him, with respect to the divinity of Christ, as “mistaken brethren;” at which time his opponents could not well complain of his being uncandid. But, when he comes to change his sentiments on that article, he treats those from whom he differs in a very different manner, loading them with every species of abuse. Witness his treatment of *Augustine*; whose conduct, previous to his conversion to christianity, though lamented with all the tokens of penitential sorrow, and entirely forsaken in the remaining period of his life, he

* Catechist. Enquiry 6.

† A friend of mine on looking over Mrs. *Barbauld*’s Pamphlet, in answer to Mr. Wakefield, remarks as follows: “Mrs. B. used to call Socinianism, *The Frigid Zone of Christianity*, but she is now got far north herself. She is amazingly clever; her language enchanting; but her caricature of Calvinism is abominable.”

industriously represents to his disadvantage; calling him “a pretended saint, but an illiterate hypocrite of wicked dispositions;” loading his memory, and even the very country where he lived, with every opprobrious epithet that could be devised.* Similar instances might be added from his *Ecclesiastical Researches*, in which the characters of *Calvin* and *Beza* are treated in an equally uncandid manner.†

Dr. *Priestley* himself, who is said to be the most candid man of his party, is seldom overloaded with this virtue when he is dealing with Calvinists. It does not discover a very great degree of perfection in this, or even in common civility, to call those who consider his principles as pernicious, by the name of “bigots, the bigots,” &c., which he very frequently does. Nor is it to the credit of his *impartiality*, any more than of his candour, when weighing the moral excellence of Trinitarians and Unitarians against each

* Hist. of Baptism, p. 652.

† Mr. Robinson, in his notes on *Claude* observes, from Mr. Burgh, that “Whatever occurs in modern writers of History, of a narrative nature, we find to be an inference from a system previously assumed, without any view to the seeming truth of the facts recorded; but to the establishment of which the historian appears, through every species of misrepresentation, to have zealously directed his force—The subversion of freedom was the evident purpose of Mr. Hume, in writing the *History of England*. I fear we may with too much justice affirm the subversion of christianity to be the object of Mr. Gibbon, in writing his *History of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire*,” Vol ii pp 147, 141. Perhaps it might with equal propriety be added that the subversion of what is commonly called orthodoxy, and the vindication, or palliation, of every thing which in every age has been called by the name of heresy, were the objects of Mr. Robinson in writing his *History of Baptism*, and what has since been published under the title of *Ecclesiastical Researches*.

other, as in a balance, to suppose, "the former to have *less*, and the latter something *more*, of a real principle of religion than they seem to have."* This looks like taking a portion out of one scale, and casting it into the other, for the purpose of making weight where it was wanting.

Dr. Priestley, in answer to Mr. *Burn on the Person of Christ*, acquits him of "any thing base, disingenuous, immoral or wicked;" and seeing Mr. Burn had not acquitted him of all such things in return, the doctor takes occasion to boast that "his principles, whatever they are, are more *candid* than those of Mr. Burn."† But if this acknowledgment, candid as it may seem, be compared with another passage in the same performance, it will appear to less advantage. In letter the fifth, the doctor goes about to account for the *motives* of his opponents, and if the following language do not insinuate any thing "base, immoral, or wicked," to have influenced Mr. Burn, it may be difficult to decide what baseness, immorality, or wickedness, is. "As to Mr. Burn's being willing to have *a gird at me*, as Falstaff says, it may easily be accounted for. He has a view to rise in his profession, and being a man of good natural understanding, and good elocution, but having had no advantage of education, or family connexions, he may think it necessary to do something in order to make himself conspicuous; and he might suppose he could not do better than follow the sure steps of those who had succeeded in the same chase before him." What can any person make of these two passages put together? It must appear, either that Dr. Priestley accused Mr. Burn of motives, of which in

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 100.

† Fam. Letters, Let. xviii.

his conscience he did not believe him to be guilty ; or that he acquitted him of every thing base and wicked, not because he thought him so, but merely with a view to glory over him by affecting to be under the influence of superiour candour and generosity.

The manner in which Dr. Priestley has treated Mr. *Badcock* in his *Familiar Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham*, holding him up as an immoral character, at a time when, unless some valuable end could have been answered by it, his memory should have been at rest, is thought to be very far from either candour or benevolence. The doctor and Mr. *Badcock* seem to have been heretofore upon friendly terms ; and not very widely asunder as to sentiment. Private letters pass between them ; and Mr. *Badcock* always acknowledges Dr. Priestley his superior. But about 1783, Mr. *Badcock* opposes his friend in the *Monthly Review*, and is thought by many to have the advantage of him. After this, he is said to act scandalously and dishonestly. He dies ; and soon after his death, Dr. Priestley avails himself of his former correspondence to expose his dishonesty : and, as if this were not enough, supplies from his own conjectures what was wanting of fact, to render him completely odious to mankind.

Dr. Priestley may plead, that he has held up “ the example of this unhappy man as a warning to others.” So, indeed, he speaks ; but thinking people will suppose, that if this *Zimri* had not *slain his master, his bones might have rested in peace*. Dr. Priestley had just cause for exposing the author of a piece, signed *Theodosius*, in the manner he has done in those Letters. Justice to himself required this : but what necessity was there for exposing Mr. *Badcock* ? Allowing that there was sufficient evidence to support the heavy charge, wherein does this affect the merits of the cause ? Does

proving a man a villain answer his arguments ? Is it worthy of a generous antagonist to avail himself of such methods to prejudice the public mind ? Does it belong to a controvertist to write his opponent's history, after he is dead, and to hold up his character in a disadvantageous light, so as to depreciate his writings ?

Whatever good opinion Socinian writers may entertain of the ability and integrity of some few individuals who differ from them, it is pretty evident that they have the *candour* to consider the body of their opponents as either *ignorant* or *insincere*. By the poem which Mr. Badcock wrote in praise of Dr. Priestley, when he was, as the doctor informs us, his "humble admirer," we may see in what light we are considered by our adversaries. Trinitarians, among the *clergy*, are there represented as "sticking fast to the church for the sake of a living ;" and those whom the writer calls "orthodox, popular preachers," (which I suppose may principally refer to *dissenters*, and *methodists*) are described as *fools* and *enthusiasts* ; as either "staring, stamping, and damning in nonsense ;" or else, whining out the tidings of salvation ; telling their auditors that grace is cheap, and works are all an empty bubble." All this is published by Dr. Priestley, in his *Twenty Second Letter to the Inhabitants of Birmingham* ; and that without any marks of disapprobation. Dr. Priestley himself, though he does not descend to so low and scurrilous a manner of writing as the above, yet suggests the same thing, in the Dedication of his *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity*. He there praises Dr. *Jebb*, for his "attachment to the unadulterated principles of christianity, how unpopular soever they may have become, through the prejudices of the *weak*, or the *interested* part of mankind."

After all, it is allowed that Dr. Priestley is in general, and especially when he is not dealing with a Calvinist, a fair and candid opponent: much more so than the Monthly Reviewers: who, with the late Mr. Badcock, seem to rank among his "humble admirers."* Candid and open, however, as Dr. Priestley in general is, the above are certainly no very trifling exceptions: and, considering him as excelling most of his party in this virtue, they are sufficient to prove the point for which they are alleged; namely, that when Socinians profess to be more candid than their opponents, their profession includes more than their conduct will justify.

I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR TENDENCY
TO PROMOTE HUMILITY.

Christian Brethren,

YOU recollect the prophecy of Isaiah, in which, speaking of gospel times, he predicts, that *the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day*; as if it were one peculiar characteristic of the true gospel to lay low the pride of man. The whole

* About eight or nine years ago, the Monthly Review was at open war with Dr. Priestley; and the doctor, like an incensed monarch, summoned all his mighty resources to expose its weakness and to degrade it in the eye of the public. The conductors of the Review, at length finding, it seems, that *their country was nourished by the King's country, desired peace*. They have ever since very punctually paid him tribute; and the conqueror seems very well contented, on this condition, to grant them his favour and protection.

tenor of the New Testament enforces the same idea. *Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise ; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty ; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are : that no flesh should glory in his presence—Jesus said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes—Where is boasting ? It is excluded. By what law ? Of works ? Nay, but by the law of faith.** It may be concluded with certainty from these passages, and various others of the same import, that the system which has the greatest tendency to promote this virtue, approaches nearest to the true gospel of Christ.

Pride, the opposite of humility, may be distinguished, by its objects, into natural and spiritual. Both consist in a too high esteem of ourselves : the one, on account of those accomplishments which are merely natural, or which pertain to us as men ; the other on account of those which are spiritual, or which pertain to us as good men. With respect to the first, it is not very difficult to know who they are that ascribe most to their own understanding ; that profess to believe in nothing but what they can comprehend ; that arrogate to themselves the name of *rational christians* : that affect to “pity all those who maintain the doctrine of two natures in Christ, as being under a debility of mind in this respect, however sensible and rational in others ;”†

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* 1 Cor. i. 26—29. Matt. xi, 25. Rom. iii. 27.

† Mr. Lindsey's Catechist, Enquiry 6.

that pour compliments extravagantly upon one another;* that speak of their own party as the wise and learned, and of their opponents as the ignorant and illiterate who are carried away by vulgar prejudices;† that tax the sacred writers with “reasoning inconclusively,” and writing “lame accounts;” and that represent themselves as men of far greater compass of mind than they, or than even Jesus Christ himself!

The last of these particulars may excite surprise. Charity, that hopeth all things, will be ready to suggest, Surely, no man, that calls himself a christian, will dare to speak so arrogantly. I acknowledge I should have thought so, if I had not read in Dr. Priestley’s *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity*, as follows: “Not that I think that the sacred writers were *Necessarians*, for they were not *philosophers*; not even our Saviour himself, as far as appears:—But their habitual devotion naturally led them to refer all things to God, without reflecting on the rigorous meaning of their language; and very probably, had they been interrogated on the subject, they would have appeared not to be apprised of the Necessarian scheme, and would have answered in a manner unfavourable to it.”‡ The sacred writers, it seems, were well-meaning persons; but at the same time so ignorant, as not to know the meaning of their own language; nay, so ignorant, that, had it been explained to them, they would have been incapable of taking it in! Nor is this suggested of the sacred writers only; but, as it should seem, of Jesus Christ himself. A very fit person Jesus Christ must be, indeed, to be addressed as *knowing all things*; as a *revealer* of the

* Mr. Toulmin’s Serm. on the Death of Mr. Robinson, p. 47, 56.

† Mr. Belsham’s Sermon on the Importance of Truth, p. 4, 32.

mind of God to men ; as *the wisdom of God* ; as he in whom *it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell* ; by whom the judges of the earth are exhorted to be *instructed* ; and who shall *judge the world* at the last day ; when, in fact, he was so ignorant as not to consider the meaning of his own language ; or, if he had been interrogated upon it, would not have been apprised of the extent of the scheme which his words naturally led to, but would probably have answered in a manner unfavourable to it ! Is this the language of one that is *little in his own eyes* ?

But there is such a thing as *spiritual* pride, or a too high esteem of ourselves on account of spiritual accomplishments ; and this, together with a spirit of *bigotry*, Dr. Priestley imputes to Trinitarians. “ Upon the whole, (says he) considering the great mixture of spiritual pride and bigotry in some of the most zealous Trinitarians, I think the moral character of Unitarians in general, allowing that there is in them a greater apparent conformity to the world than is observable in others, approaches more nearly to the proper temper of christianity. It is more cheerful, more benevolent, and more candid. The former have probably less, and the latter, I hope, somewhat more, of a real principle of religion, than they seem to have.”* To this it is replied,

First: If Trinitarians be proud at all, it seems it must be of their spirituality ; for, as to rationality, they have none, their opponents having by a kind of exclusive charter, monopolized that article. It is their misfortune, it seems, when investigating the doctrine of the person of Christ, to be under a “ debility of mind,” or a kind of periodical insanity.

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 100

Secondly : Admitting that a greater degree of spiritual pride exists among Trinitarians, than among their opponents ; if we were, for once to follow Dr. Priestley's example, it might be accounted for without any reflection upon their principles. Pride is a sin that easily besets human nature, though nothing is more opposite to the spirit that becomes us ; and, whatever it is in which a body of men excel, they are under a peculiar temptation to be proud of that rather than of other things. The English people have been often charged by their neighbours with pride, on account of their civil constitution ; and, I suppose, it has not been without reason. They have conceived themselves to excel other nations in that particular ; have been apt to value themselves upon it ; and to undervalue their neighbours more than they ought. This has been their fault : but it does not prove that their civil constitution has not, after all, its excellencies. Nay, perhaps the reason why some of their neighbours have not been so proud in this particular as they, is, they have not had that to be proud of. Christians in general are more likely to be the subjects of spiritual pride than avowed infidels ; for, the pride of the latter, though it may rise to the highest pitch imaginable, will not be in their *spirituality*. The same may be said of Socinians. For, while “ a great number of them are only men of good sense, and without much practical religion,” as Dr. Priestley acknowledges they are,* their pride will not be in their spirituality, but in their supposed rationality.

Thirdly : Let it be considered whether our doctrinal sentiments do not bear a nearer affinity to those principles which in scripture are constantly urged as motives

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 100.

to humility, than those of our opponents.—The doctrines inculcated by Christ and his apostles, in order to lay men low in the dust before God, were those of human depravity, and salvation by free and sovereign grace through Jesus Christ. The language held out by our Lord was, that *he came to seek and to save that which was lost*. The general strain of his preaching tended to inform mankind, not only that he came to save *lost* sinners; but that no man under any other character could partake of the blessings of salvation. *I came*, saith he, *not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick*. To the same purpose the apostle of the Gentiles declared to the Ephesians, *You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins: wherein, in time past, ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*. Nor did he speak this of Gentiles, or of profligates only; but though himself a Jew, and educated a Pharisee, he added, *Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath even as others*. To the doctrine of the universal depravity of human nature, he very properly and joyfully proceeds to oppose that of God's rich mercy. *But God who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ*. The humbling doctrine of salvation by undeserved favour was so natural an inference from these premises, that the apostle could not forbear throwing in such a reflection, though it were in a parenthesis; *By grace ye are saved!* Nor did he leave it

there, but presently after drew the same conclusion more fully : *For by grace ye are saved through faith ; and that not of yourselves ; it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast.** To the same purport he taught in his other epistles : *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began—Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us—Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.†*

These, we see, were the sentiments by which Christ and his apostles taught men humility, and cut off boasting. But as though it were designed in perfect opposition to the apostolic doctrine, Socinian writers are constantly exclaiming against the Calvinistic system, because it maintains the insufficiency of a good moral life to recommend us to the favour of God. “Repentance and a good life, (says Dr. Priestley) are *of themselves* sufficient to recommend us to the divine favour.”‡—“When, (says Mrs. Barbauld) will christians permit themselves to believe, that the same conduct which gains them the approbation of good men here, will secure the favour of Heaven hereafter?—When a man, like Dr. Price, is about to resign his soul into the hands of his Maker, he ought to do it not only with a reliance on his mercy, but his *justice*—It does not become him to pay the blasphemous homage of deprecating the wrath

* Ephes. ii. 1—9.

† 2 Tim. i. 9 Titus iii. 5. 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

‡ Hist. of Corrup. of Christianity, Vol. 1. p. 155.

of God, when he ought to throw himself into the arms of his love."*—"Other foundation than this can no man lay : (says Dr. Harwood) All hopes founded upon any thing else than a good moral life, are merely imaginary."† *So they wrap it up.* If a set of writers united together, and studied to form an hypothesis in perfect contradiction to the holy scriptures, and the declared humbling tendency of the gospel, they could not have hit upon a point more directly to their purpose. The whole tenor of the gospel says, *It is NOT of works, lest any man should boast :* But Socinian writers maintain, that it is of works, and of them only ; that in this, and in no other way, is the divine favour to be obtained. We might ask, *Where is boasting then ? Is it excluded ?* NAY ; Is it not admitted and cherished ?

Christ and his apostles inculcated humility, by teaching the primitive christians that *virtue itself* was not of themselves, but the gift of God. They not only expressly declared this with respect to faith, but the same, in effect, of every particular included in the general notion of true godliness. *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself,* said Christ, *except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me : for without me ye can do nothing—We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them—He worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.‡* The manifest design of these important sayings, was, to humble the primitive christians, and to make them feel their entire dependence upon God for virtue, even for every good thought.

* Answer to Mr. Wakefield.

† Sermons, p. 193.

‡ John xv. 4, 5. Eph. ii. 10. Phil. ii. 13.

Who maketh thee to differ, said the apostle, *and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?** The Calvinistic system, it is well known, includes the same things: but where is the place for them, or where do they appear, in the system of our opponents? Dr. Priestley, in professed opposition to Calvinism, maintains, that “it depends entirely upon a man’s *self* whether he be virtuous or vicious, happy or miserable;”† That is to say, it is a man’s self that maketh him to differ from another; and he has that (namely, virtue) which he did not receive, and in which therefore he may glory.‡

Dr. Priestley replies to this kind of reasoning, “When we consider ourselves as *the workmanship of*

* 1 Cor. iv. 7. † Doc. of Necessity, p. 153.

‡ It is true, Dr. Priestley himself sometimes allows that virtue is *not our own*, and does *not arise from within ourselves*; calling that mere *heathen stoicism*, which maintains the contrary: and tells us, that “those persons, who, from a principle of religion, ascribe more to God, and less to man, are persons of the greatest elevation in piety.” *On Necessity*, pp. 107, 108. Yet in the same performance he represents it as a part of the Necessarian scheme, by which it is opposed to Calvinism, that “it depends entirely upon a man’s *self*, whether he be virtuous or vicious.” P. 153. If Dr. Priestley mean no more by these expressions, than that our conduct in life, whether virtuous or vicious, depends upon our choice, the Calvinistic scheme, as well as his own, allows of it. But if he mean that a virtuous choice originates in ourselves, and that we are the proper cause of it, this can agree to nothing but the Arminian notion of a self-determining power in the will, and that in fact, as he himself elsewhere observes, is “mere *heathen stoicism*, which allows men to pray for external things, but admonishes them, that, as for virtue, it *is our own*, and must arise *from within ourselves*, if we have it at all.” P. 69.

God; that all our powers, of body and of mind, are derived from him; that he is *the giver of every good and of every perfect gift*, and that without him we can do and enjoy nothing, how can we conceive ourselves to be in a state of greater dependence, or obligation; that is, what greater reason or foundation can there possibly be for the exercise of *humility*? If I believe that I have a power to do the duty that God requires of me; yet as I also believe that that power is his gift, I must still say, *What have I that I have not received, and how then can I glory as if I had not received it?*”*

It is true, Dr. Priestley, and for ought I know, all other writers, except atheists, acknowledge themselves indebted to God for the powers by which virtue is attained, and perhaps for the means of attaining it; but this is not acknowledging that we are indebted to him for virtue itself. Powers and opportunities are mere natural blessings; they have no virtue in them, but are a kind of talent capable of being improved, or not improved. Virtue consists, not in the possession of natural powers, any more than in health, or learning, or riches; but in the use that is made of them. God does not, therefore, upon this principle, give us virtue. Dr. Priestley contends, that as we are “God’s *workmanship*, and derive all our powers of body and mind from him, we cannot conceive of ourselves as being in a state of greater dependence upon him.” The apostle Paul, however, teaches the necessity of being *created in Christ Jesus unto good works*. According to Paul, we must become his *workmanship* by a new creation, in order to the performance of good works: but according to Dr. Priestley, the first creation is sufficient. Now, if so, the *difference* be-

* On Differ. of Opin. § iii.

tween one man and another is not to be ascribed to God : for it is supposed, that God has given all men the powers of attaining virtue, and that the difference between the virtuous man and his neighbour is to be ascribed to himself, in making a good use of the powers and opportunities with which he was invested. Upon this system, therefore, we may justly answer the question, *What hast thou which thou hast not received?* I have *virtue*, and the promise of eternal life as its reward, and consequently have whereof to glory. In short, the whole of Dr. Priestley's concessions amount to nothing more than the heathen stoicism, which he elsewhere condemns. Those ancient philosophers could not deny, that all their powers were originally derived from above ; yet they maintained that as for virtue, it is *our own*, and must arise *from within ourselves*, if we have it at all."

I do not deny that all men have natural powers, together with means and opportunities of doing good ; which, if they were but completely well-disposed, are equal to the performance of their whole duty. God requires no more of us, than to love and serve him with *ALL our strength*. These powers and opportunities render them accountable beings, and will leave them without excuse at the last day. But if they are *not* rightly disposed, all their natural powers will be abused ; and the question is, To whom are we indebted for *a change of disposition* ? If to God, we have reason to lie in the dust, and acknowledge it was he that *quickened us, when we were dead in sins* : if to ourselves, the doctrine of the stoics will be established, and we shall have *whereof to glory*.

I am, &c.

LETTER X.

ON CHARITY : IN WHICH IS CONSIDERED THE CHARGE
OF BIGOTRY.

Christian Brethren,

THE main reason why we are accused of spiritual pride, bigotry, uncharitableness, and the like, is, the *importance* which we ascribe to some of our sentiments. Viewing them as essential to christianity, we cannot, properly speaking, acknowledge those who reject them as christians. It is this which provokes the resentment of our opponents, and induces them to load us with opprobrious epithets. We have already touched upon this topic, in the *Letter on Candour*, but will now consider it more particularly.

It is allowed, that we ought not to judge of whole bodies of men by the denomination under which they pass ; because names do not always describe the real principles they embrace. It is possible that a person who attends upon a very unsound ministry, may not understand or adopt so much of the system which he hears inculcated, as that his disposition shall be formed, or his conduct regulated, by it. I have heard, from persons who have been much conversant with Socinians, that though, in general, they are of a loose, dissipated turn of mind, assembling in the gay circles of pleasure, and following the customs and manners of the world ; yet that there are some among them who are more serious ; and that these, if not in their conversation, yet in their solemn addresses to the Almighty, incline to the doctrines of Calvinism. This perfectly accords with Mrs. Barbauld's representation of the matter, as noticed towards the close of the *Sixth Letter*. These people

are not, properly speaking, Socinians ; and, therefore, ought to be left quite out of the question. For the question is, Whether, as believing in the Deity and atonement of Christ, with other correspondent doctrines, we be required by the charity inculcated in the gospel, to acknowledge, as fellow-christians, those who thoroughly and avowedly reject them ?

It is no part of the business of this Letter, to prove that these doctrines are true ; this, at present, I have a right to take for granted. The fair state of the objection, if delivered by a Socinian, would be to this effect : ‘ Though your sentiments should be right, yet, by refusing to acknowledge others who differ from you, as fellow-christians, you over-rate their importance, and so violate the charity recommended by the gospel.’ To the objection as thus stated, I shall endeavour to reply.

Charity, it is allowed, will induce us to put the most favourable construction upon things, and to entertain the most favourable opinion of persons, that truth will admit. It is far from the spirit of christianity, to indulge a censorious temper, or to take pleasure in drawing unfavourable conclusions against any person whatever ; but the tenderest disposition towards mankind cannot convert truth into falsehood, or falsehood into truth. Unless, therefore, we reject the Bible, and the belief of *any* thing as necessary to salvation ; though we should stretch our good opinion of men to the greatest lengths, yet we must stop somewhere. Charity itself does not so *believe all things*, as to disregard truth and evidence. We are sometimes reminded of our Lord’s command, *Judge not, lest ye be judged*. This language is doubtless designed to reprove a censorious disposition, which leads people to pass *unjust* judgment, or to discern *a mote in a brother’s eye, while they are blind to a beam in their own* : but it cannot be intend-

ed to forbid *all* judgment whatever, even upon characters ; for this would be contrary to what our Lord teaches in the same discourse, warning his disciples to *beware of false prophets, who would come to them in sheep's clothing : adding, Ye shall know them by their fruits.** Few pretend, that we ought to think favourably of *profligate* characters ; or that it is any breach of charity to think unfavourably concerning them. But, if the words of our Lord be understood as forbidding *all judgment whatever* upon characters, it must be wrong to pass any judgment upon them. Nay, it must be wrong for a minister to declare to a drunkard, a thief, or an adulterer, that, if he die in his present condition, he must perish ; because this is judging the party not to be in a state of salvation.

All the use that is commonly made of our Lord's words, is in favour of *sentiments*, not of *actions* : but the scriptures make no such distinction. Men are there represented as being under the wrath of God, who have *not believed* on the name of the only-begotten Son of God ; nor is there any thing intimated in our Lord's expressions, as if the judgment, which he forbade his disciples to pass, were to be confined to matters of sentiment. The judgment, which is there reprov'd, is *partial* or *wrong* judgment, whether it be on account of sentiment, or of practice. Even those who plead against judging persons on account of sentiment (many of them at least) allow themselves to think unfavourably of avowed infidels, who have heard the gospel, but continue to reject it. They themselves, therefore, do judge unfavourably of men on account of their sentiments ; and must do so, unless they will reject the bible, which declares unbelievers to be under condemnation.

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* Matt. vii. 1, 2, 3, 15, 16.

Dr. Priestley, however, seems to extend his favourable opinion to idolaters and infidels, without distinction. "All differences in modes of worship, (he says) may be only the different methods by which different men (who are equally *the offspring of God*) are endeavouring to honour and obey their common Parent."* He also inveighs against a supposition, that the mere holding of any *opinions* (so it seems the great articles of our faith must be called) should exclude men from the favour of God. It is true, what he says is guarded so much, as to give the argument he engages to support a very plausible appearance; but withal so ill directed, as not in the least to affect that of his opponents. His words are these: "Let those who maintain that the mere holding of any *opinions* (without regard to the *motives and state of mind* through which men may have been led to form them) will necessarily exclude them from the favour of God, be particularly careful with respect to the premises from which they draw so alarming a conclusion." The counsel contained in these words is undoubtedly very good. Those premises ought to be well founded from whence such a conclusion is drawn. I do not, indeed, suppose, that any ground for such a conclusion exists: and who they are that draw it I cannot tell. The *mere* holding of an opinion, considered abstractedly from the motive, or state of mind of him that holds it, must be simply an exercise of intellect; and, I am inclined to think, has in it neither good nor evil. But the question is, Whether there be not truths, which, from the nature of them, cannot be rejected without an evil bias of heart? And, therefore, where we see those truths rejected, Whether we have not authority to conclude that such rejection must have arisen from an evil bias?

* On Differ. of Opin. § ii.

If a man say, *There is no God*, the scripture teaches us to consider it, rather as the language of his *heart*, than simply of his judgment; and makes no scruple of calling him a *fool*; which according to the scriptural idea of the term, is equal to calling him a *wicked man*. And let it be seriously considered, upon what other principle our Lord could send forth his disciples to *preach the gospel to every creature*, and add as he did, *He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned*. Is it not here plainly supposed that the gospel was accompanied with such evidence, that no intelligent creature could reject it, but from an evil bias of heart, such as would justly expose him to damnation? If it had been possible for an intelligent creature, after hearing the gospel, to think Jesus an impostor, and his doctrine a lie, without any evil motive, or corrupt state of mind; I desire to know how the Lord of glory is to be acquitted of something worse than bigotry in making such a declaration.

Because the mere holding of an opinion, irrespective of the motive or state of mind in him that holds it, is neither good nor evil, it does not follow, that "all differences in modes of worship may be only the different methods by which different men are endeavouring to honour and obey their common parent." The latter includes more than the former. The performance of worship contains more than the mere holding of an opinion: for it includes an exercise of the heart. Our Lord and his apostles did not proceed on any such principle, when they went forth preaching the gospel; as I hope hath been sufficiently proved in the *Letter on Candour*. The principles on which they proceeded were, *An assurance that they were of God, and that the whole world were lying in*

wickedness—*That he who was of God would hear their words ; and he that was not of God would not hear them—That he who believed their testimony, set to his seal that God was true ; and he that believed it not, made God a liar.*

If we consider a belief of the gospel, in those who hear it, as essential to salvation, we shall be called bigots : but, if this be bigotry, Jesus Christ and his apostles were bigots ; and the same outcry might have been raised against them, by both Jews and Greeks, as is now raised against us. Jesus Christ himself said to the Jews, *If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins :* and his apostles went forth with the same language. They wrote and preached that men *might believe that Jesus was the Christ ; and that, believing, they might have life through his name.* Those who embraced their testimony, they treated as in a state of salvation ; and those who rejected it were told, that they had *judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life.* In short, they acted as men fully convinced of the truth of what their Lord had declared in their commission ; *He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved ; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.*

To all this an unbelieving Jew might have objected, in that day, with quite as good a grace as Socinians object in this : ‘ These men think, that our salvation depends upon receiving their opinions ! Have not we been the people of God, and in a state of salvation, time out of mind, without believing that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God ? Our fathers believed only in general, that there was a Messiah to come ; and were, no doubt, saved in that faith. We also believe the same, and worship the same God ; and yet, according to these bigots, if we reject their

opinion, concerning Jesus being the Messiah, we must be *judged unworthy of everlasting life.*'

A *heathen* also, suppose one of Paul's hearers at Athens, who had just heard him deliver the discourse at Mars-hill, (recorded in Acts xvii. 22—31.) might have addressed his countrymen in some such language as the following: 'This Jewish stranger, Athenians, pretends to make known to us THE UNKNOWN GOD. Had he been able to make good his pretensions, and had this been all, we might have been obliged to him. But this *unknown God*, it seems, is to take place of all others that are known, and be set up at their expense. You have hitherto, Athenians, acted worthy of yourselves; you have liberally admitted all the gods to a participation of your worship: but now, it seems, the whole of your sacred services is to be engrossed by one. You have never been used to put any restraint upon *thought* or *opinion*; but with the utmost freedom have ever been in search of *new things*. But this man tells us we OUGHT NOT TO THINK *that the godhead is like unto silver or gold*; as though we were bound to adopt his manner of thinking and no other. You have been famed for your adoration of the gods; and to this even your accuser himself has borne witness: yet he has the temerity to call us to *repentance* for it. It seems, then, we are considered in the light of *criminals*—criminals on account of our *devotions*—criminals for being *too* religious, and for adhering to the religion of our ancestors! Will Athenians endure this? Had he possessed the *liberality* becoming one who should address an Athenian audience, he would have supposed, that, however we might have been hitherto mistaken in our *devotions*, yet our intentions were

good ; and that “ All the differences in modes of worship, as practised by Jews and Athenians, (who are equally, by his own confession, *the offspring of God*) may have been only different methods, by which we have been endeavouring to honour and obey our common parent.” ‘ Nor is this all : for we are called to repentance, BECAUSE *this unknown God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world, &c.* So then, we are to renounce our principles and worship, and embrace his, on pain of being called to give an account of it before a divine tribunal. Future happiness is to be confined to his sect ; and our eternal welfare depends upon our embracing his opinions ! Could your ears have been insulted, Athenians, with an harangue more replete with “ *pride, arrogance, and bigotry ?*”

‘ But to say no more of this insulting language, the *importance* he gives to his opinions, if there were no other objection, must ever be a bar to their being received at Athens. You, Athenians, are friends to *free inquiry*. But should our philosophers turn christians, instead of being famous, as heretofore, for the search of *new truth*, they must sink into a state of mental stagnation. “ Those persons who think that their salvation depends upon holding their present opinions, must necessarily entertain the greatest dread of *free inquiry*. They must think it to be hazarding of their eternal welfare, to listen to any arguments, or to read any books, that savour of idolatry. It must appear to them in the same light as listening to any other temptation, whereby they would be in danger of being seduced to their everlasting destruction. This temper of mind cannot but be a foundation for the most deplorable bigotry, obstinacy, and ignorance.”

‘The Athenians, I doubt not, will generally abide by the religion of their forefathers: but should any individuals think of turning christians, I trust they will never adopt that illiberal principle of making their opinion necessary to future happiness. While this man and his followers hold such a notion “of the *importance* of their present sentiments, they must needs live in the dread of all free inquiry; whereas we, who have not that idea of the importance of our present sentiments, preserve a state of mind proper for the discussion of them. If we be wrong, as our minds are under no strong bias, we are within the reach of conviction; and thus are in the way to grow wiser and better as long as we live.”

By the above it will appear, that the apostle Paul was just as liable as we are to the charge of bigotry. Those parts which are marked with *double* reversed commas, are, with only an alteration of the term *heresy* to that of *idolatry*, the words of Dr. *Priestley* in the *Second Section* of his *Considerations on Differences of Opinions*. Judge, brethren, whether these words best fit the lips of a christian minister, or of a heathen caviller. The consequences alleged by the supposed Athenian against Paul, are far from just, and might be easily refuted: but they are the same for substance as those alleged by Dr. *Priestley* against us, and the premises from which they are drawn are exactly the same.

From the whole, I think, it may safely be concluded, if there be any sentiments taught us in the New Testament in a clear and decided manner, this is one: That the apostles and primitive preachers considered the belief of the gospel which they preached, as necessary to the salvation of those who heard it.

But though it should be allowed that a belief of the gospel is necessary to salvation, it will still be objected, That Socinians believe the gospel as well as others; their christianity therefore ought not to be called in question on this account. To this it is replied; If what Socinians believe be indeed the gospel; in other words, if it be not deficient in what is essential to the gospel; they undoubtedly ought to be acknowledged as christians: but if otherwise, they ought not. It has been pleaded by some, who are not Socinians, that we ought to think favourably of all who profess to embrace christianity *in general*, unless their conduct be manifestly immoral. But we have no such criterion afforded us in the New Testament; nor does it accord with what is there revealed. The New Testament informs us of various *wolves in sheep's clothing*, who appeared among the primitive christians; men who professed the christian name, but yet were in reality enemies to christianity; who *perverted the gospel of Christ*, and introduced *another gospel* in its place.

But these men, it is said, not only taught false doctrine, but led *immoral lives*. If by *immoral* be meant grossly wicked, they certainly did not all of them answer to that character. The contrary is plainly supposed in the account of the false apostles among the Corinthians; who are called *deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light: therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness.** I would not here be understood as drawing a comparison between the false apostles and the Socinians. My design in this place, is not to insin-

* 2 Cor. xi. 13—15.

uate any specific charge against them ; but merely to prove, that if we judge favourably of the state of every person who bears the christian name, and whose exterior moral character is fair, we must judge contrary to the scriptures.

To talk of forming a favourable judgment from a profession of christianity *in general*, is as contrary to reason and common sense, as it is to the New Testament. Christianity, in general, must comprehend some of the leading particulars of it. Suppose a candidate for a seat in the House of Commons, on being asked his political principles, should profess himself a friend to *liberty in general*. A freeholder inquires, 'Do you disapprove, Sir, of taxation without representation ? No. Would you vote for a reform in parliament ? No. Do you approve of the liberty of the press ? No.' Would this afford satisfaction ? Is it not common for men to admit that in the gross which they deny in detail ? The only question that can fairly be urged is ; Are the doctrines which Socinians disown, supposing them to be true, of such importance, that a rejection of them would endanger their salvation ?

It must be allowed, that these doctrines *may* be what we consider them ; not only true, but *essential* to christianity. Christianity, like every other system of truth, must have some principles which are essential to it ; and if those in question be such, it cannot justly be imputed to pride, or bigotry ; it cannot be uncharitable or uncandid, or indicate any want of benevolence, to think so. Neither can it be wrong to draw a natural and necessary conclusion, that those persons who reject these principles are not christians. To think justly of persons, is, in no respect, inconsistent with a universal good-will towards them. It is not in the least contrary to charity, to consider un-

believers in the light in which the scriptures represent them; nor those who reject what is essential to the gospel, as rejecting the gospel itself.

Dr. Priestley will not deny that christianity has its *great truths*, though he will not allow the doctrines in question to make any part of them. “The being of a God—his constant over-ruling providence, and righteous moral government—the divine origin of the Jewish and christian revelations—that Christ was a teacher sent from God—that he is our master, lawgiver, and judge—that God raised him from the dead—that he is now exalted at the right hand of God—that he will come again to raise all the dead, and sit in judgment upon them—and that he will then give to every one of us according to our works—These, (he says) are, properly speaking, the *only great truths of religion*; and to these not only the *Church of England*, and the *Church of Scotland*, but even the *Church of Rome* gives its assent.”* We see here, that Dr. Priestley not only allows that there are certain great truths of religion, but determines what, and what “only” they are. I do not recollect, however, that the false teachers in the churches of Galatia denied any one of these articles; and yet without rejecting some of the *great and essential* truths of christianity, they could not have *perverted* the gospel of Christ, or have introduced *another gospel*.

But Dr. Priestley, it seems, though he allows the above to be *great truths*, yet considers nothing as *essential* to christianity, but *a belief of the divine mission of Christ*. “While a man believes, (he says) in the divine mission of Christ, he might with as much propriety be called a Mahometan as be de-

* Fam. Letters. Letter xxii.

nied to be a christian.”* To call Socinians *Mahometans*, might in most cases be improper: they would still, however, according to this criterion of christianity, be within the pale of the church. For Mahomet himself, I suppose, never denied the divine mission of Christ; nor very few of those doctrines which Dr. Priestley calls “the *only* great truths of religion.” The doctor informs us, that “some people consider him already as half a Mahometan.”† Whether this be just or unjust, according to *his* notions of christianity, a Mahometan is to be considered as more than half a christian. He ought, if the above criterion be just, to be acknowledged as a fellow-christian; and the whole party, instead of being ranked with heathenish and Jewish unbelievers, as they are by this same writer,‡ ought to be considered as a sect, or denomination of christians. The doctor, therefore, need not have stopped at the *Church of Rome*, but might have added the *Church of Constantinople*, as agreeing in his “only great truths of religion.”

I scarcely need to draw the conclusion which follows from what has been observed—If not only those who *perverted the gospel* among the Galatians, did, but even the *Mahometans* may acknowledge those truths which Dr. Priestley mentions, they cannot be the *only* great, much less the *distinguishing* truths of the christian religion.

The difference between Socinians and Calvinists, is not about the mere circumstantials of religion. It respects nothing less than the *rule* of faith, the *ground* of hope, and the *object* of worship. If the Socinians be right, we are not only superstitious dev-

* Consider. on Differ. of Opin. § v.

† Pref. to Let. to Mr. Burn.

‡ Fam. Let. Let. xvii. Conclusion.

otees, and deluded dependants upon an arm of flesh,* but habitual idolaters. On the other hand, if we be right, they are guilty of refusing to subject their faith to the edicts of Heaven; of rejecting the only way of salvation; and of sacrilegiously depriving the Son of God of his essential glory. It is true, they do not deny our christianity on account of our supposed idolatry; but no reason can be assigned for it, except their indifference to religious truth, and the deistical turn of their sentiments.

If the proper Deity of Christ be a divine truth, it is a great and a fundamental truth in christianity. Socinians, who reject it, very consistently reject the worship of Christ with it. But worship enters into the essence of religion; and the worship of Christ, according to the New Testament, into the essence of the christian religion. The primitive christians are characterised by, *their calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus*. The apostle, when writing to the Corinthians; addressed himself *To the church of God at Corinth: to them that were sanctified in Christ Jesus; called to be saints; with all that in every place CALLED UPON THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.*† That this is designed as a description of true christians will not be denied; but this description does not include Socinians, seeing they call not upon the name of Christ. The conclusion

* Jer. xxvii. 6.

† Mr. Lindsey's observation, that *Called upon the name of Christ*, should be rendered, *Called by the name of Christ*, if applied to Rom. x. 13, would make the scriptures promise salvation to every one that is *called* a Christian. Salvation is promised to all who *believe, love, fear, and call upon the name of the Lord*; but never are the possessors of it described by a mere accidental circumstance, in which they are not voluntary, and in which, if they were, there is no virtue.

is, Socinians would not have been acknowledged by the apostle Paul as true christians.

If the Deity of Christ be a divine truth, it must be the Father's will, that all men should honour the Son in the same sense, and to the same degree, as they honour the Father ; and those who honour him not as God, will not only be found opposing the divine will, but are included in the number of those who, by refusing to honour the Son, *honour not the Father who hath sent him* : which amounts to nothing less, than that the worship which they pay to the Father is unacceptable in his sight.

If the Deity of Christ be a divine truth, he is the object of *trust* ; and that not merely in the character of a witness, but as *Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength*. This appears to be another characteristic of true christians in the New Testament. *In his name shall the Gentiles trust—I know whom I have trusted : and that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him—In whom ye also trusted after ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.** But if it be a characteristic of true christianity so to trust in Christ, as to commit the salvation of our souls into his hands ; how can we conceive of those as true christians, who consider him only as a fellow creature ; and consequently place no such confidence in him ?

If men by nature be in a *lost and perishing* condition ; and if Christ came to seek and save them under those characters, as he himself constantly testified ; then all those that were whole in their own eyes, and seemed to need no physician, as the Scribes and Pharisees of old, must necessarily be excluded from an interest in his salvation. And in what other light can

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* Matt. xii. 21. 2 Tim. i. 12. Eph. i. 12, 13.

these persons be considered, who deny the depravity of their nature, and approach the Deity without respect to an atoning Saviour?—Further :

If the death of Christ, as an atoning sacrifice, be the only way of a sinner's salvation ; if there be *No other name given under heaven, or among men, by which we must be saved ;* if this be the *foundation which God hath laid in Zion*, and if no other will stand in the day of trial : How can we conceive that those who deliberately disown it, and renounce all dependance upon it for acceptance with God, should yet be interested in it ? Is it supposable, that they will partake of that *forgiveness of sins*, which believers are said to receive *for his sake, and through his name*, who refuse to make use of that name in any of their petitions ?

If the doctrine of atonement by the cross of Christ be a divine truth, it constitutes the very substance of the gospel ; and, consequently, is essential to it. The doctrine of the cross is represented in the New Testament as the grand peculiarity, and the principal glory of christianity. It occupies a large proportion among the doctrines of scripture, and is expressed in a vast variety of language. Christ *was delivered for our offences, wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities—He died for our sins—By his death purged our sins*—is said to *take (or bear) away the sins of the world*—to have *made peace through the blood of his cross—reconciled us to God by his death—redeemed us by his blood—washed us from our sins in his own blood—by his own blood obtained eternal redemption for us—purchased his church by his own blood, &c. &c.* This kind of language is so interwoven with the doctrine of the New Testament, that to explain away the one, is to subvert the other. The doctrine of the cross is described as being, not merely an important branch of the gospel, but

the gospel itself. We preach Christ crucified ; to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness : but to them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God—I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified—An enemy to the cross of Christ is only another mode of describing an enemy to the gospel. - It was reckoned a sufficient refutation of any principle, if it could be proved to involve in it the consequence of Christ's having died in vain.† Christ's dying for our sins, is not only declared to be a divine truth according to the scriptures, but a truth of such importance, that the then present standing, and the final salvation of the Corinthians, were suspended upon their adherence to it.‡ In fine, the doctrine of the cross is the central point in which all the lines of evangelical truth meet and are united. What the sun is to the system of nature, that the doctrine of the cross is to the system of the gospel ; it is the LIFE of it. The revolving planets might as well exist and keep their course without the attracting influence of the one, as a gospel be exhibited worthy of the name that should leave out the other.*

I am aware that Socinian writers do not allow the doctrine of the *atonement* to be signified by that of the *cross*. They would tell you, that they believe in the doctrine of the cross, and allow it to have a *relative* or *subordinate* importance, rendering the truth of Christ's resurrection more evident, by cutting off all pretence that he was not really dead.|| Whether this meagre sense of the phrase will agree with the design of the apostle in this and various other passages in the New Testament,—whether it contains a sufficient ground for

* 1 Cor. i. 23, 24. ii. 2. † Gal. ii. 21. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 1, 2, 3.

|| Dr. Priestley's Serm. on glorying in the cross.

that singular *glorying* of which he speaks, or any principle by which *the world was crucified to him, and he unto the world*,—let the impartial judge. But be this as it may, the question here is not whether the doctrine of atonement be signified by that of the cross; but supposing it to be so, whether it be of such importance as to render a denial of it a virtual denial of christianity?—Once more :

If we believe in the absolute necessity of *regeneration*, or that a sinner must be renewed in the spirit of his mind, or never enter the kingdom of God; in what light must we consider those who plead for a reformation only, and deny the doctrine of a supernatural divine influence, by which a *new heart is given us, and a new spirit is put within us*? Ought we, or can we consider them as the subject of a divine change, who are continually ridiculing the very idea of it?

It is common for our opponents to stigmatize us with the name of *bigots*. Bigotry, if I understand it, is a blind and inordinate attachment to one's opinions. If we be attached to principles on account of their being *our's*, or because *we* have adopted them, rather than because they appear to us to be taught in the holy scriptures; if we be attached to *some* peculiar principles to the neglect of *others*, or so as to give them a greater proportion in the system than they require; if we consider things as being of greater importance than the scriptures represent them; if we obstinately adhere to our opinions, so as to be averse to free inquiry, and not open to conviction; if we make so much of principles as to be inattentive to holy practice; or if a difference in religious sentiment destroy or damp our benevolence to the persons of those from whom we differ; in any of these cases, we are subject to the charge of bigotry. But we may

consider a belief of certain doctrines as necessary to salvation, without coming under any part of the above description. We may be attached to these doctrines, not because we have already embraced them, but on account of their appearing to us to be revealed in the scriptures: we may give them only that degree of importance in our views of things, which they occupy there: we may be so far friends to free inquiry, as impartially to search the scriptures to see whether these things be true; and so open to conviction as to relinquish our sentiments, when they are proved to be unscriptural. We may be equally attached to practical godliness, as to the principles on which it is founded; and notwithstanding our ill opinion of the religious sentiments of men, and our apprehensions of the danger of their condition, we may yet bear good-will to their persons, and wish for nothing more than an opportunity of promoting their welfare, both for this life and that which is to come.

I do not pretend that Calvinists are free from bigotry; neither are their opponents. What I here contend for, is, That their considering a belief of certain doctrines as necessary to salvation, unless it can be proved that they make more of these doctrines than the scriptures make of them, ought not to subject them to such a charge.

What is there of bigotry in our not reckoning the Socinians to be christians, more than in their reckoning us *idolaters*? Mr. Madan complained of the Socinians “insulting those of his principles with the charge of idolatry.” Dr. Priestley justified them by observing, “All who believe Christ to be a man, and not God, must necessarily *think* it idolatrous to pay him divine honours; and to *call* it so, is no other than the necessary consequence of avowing our belief.”

Nay, he represents it as ridiculous, that they should "be allowed to think the Trinitarians idolaters, without being permitted to call them so."* If Socinians have a right to think Trinitarians idolaters, they have doubtless a right to call them so, and, if they be able, to make it appear so : nor ought we to consider ourselves as insulted by it. I have no idea of being offended with any man, in affairs of this kind, for speaking what he believes to be the truth. Instead of courting compliments from each other, in matters of such moment, we ought to encourage an unreservedness of expression, provided it be accompanied with sobriety and benevolence. But neither ought Socinians to complain of our refusing to acknowledge them as christians, or to impute it to a spirit of bigotry ; for it amounts to nothing more than avowing a necessary consequence of our belief. If we believe the deity and atonement of Christ to be essential to christianity, we must necessarily think those who reject these doctrines to be no christians ; nor is it inconsistent with charity to speak accordingly.

Again : What is there of bigotry in our not allowing the Socinians to be christians, more than in their not allowing us to be *Unitarians* ? We profess to believe in the divine unity, as much as they do in christianity. But they consider a oneness of person, as well as of essence, to be essential to the unity of God ; and, therefore, cannot acknowledge us as Unitarians : and we consider the deity and atonement of Christ as essential to christianity ; and, therefore, cannot acknowledge them as christians. *We* do not choose to call Socinians Unitarians, because that would be a virtual acknowledgment that we ourselves do not believe in the divine unity : but we are not of-

* Familiar Letters, Let. VI.

fended at what they think of us ; nor do we impute it to bigotry, or to any thing of the kind. We know, that while they think as they do on the doctrine of the Trinity, our sentiments must appear to them as Tritheism. We comfort ourselves in these matters with this, that the thoughts of creatures, uninspired of God, are liable to mistake. Such are their's concerning us, and such are our's concerning them ; and if Socinians do indeed *love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity*, it is happy for them. The judgment of their fellow-creatures cannot affect their state : and thousands who have scrupled to admit them among the true followers of Christ in this world, would rejoice to find themselves mistaken in that matter at the last day.

It has been pleaded by some, who are not Socinians, that a belief in the doctrine of the atonement is not necessary to salvation. They observe, That the disciples of our Lord, previous to his death, do not appear to have embraced the idea of a vicarious sacrifice ; and therefore conclude, that a belief in a vicarious sacrifice is not of the essence of faith. They add, It was owing to prejudice, and consequently wrong, for the disciples to disbelieve this doctrine, and admit the same thing with respect to Socinians : yet as the error in the one case did not endanger their salvation, they suppose it may not do so in the other. To this objection the following observations are offered in reply.

First: Those who object in this manner do not suppose the disciples of Christ to have agreed with Socinians in any of their peculiar sentiments, except the rejection of a *vicarious sacrifice*. They allow them to have believed in the doctrine of human depravity, divine influence, the miraculous conception,

the pre-existence and proper deity of Christ, the inspiration of the scriptures, &c. The case of the disciples, therefore, is far from being parallel with that of the Socinians.

Secondly : Whatever were the ignorance and error which occupied the minds of the disciples relative to the death of their Lord, their case will not apply to that of Socinians, on account of the difference in the state of revelation, as it stood before and after that event. Were it even allowed that the disciples did reject the doctrine of Christ's being a vicarious sacrifice ; yet the circumstances which they were under, render their case very different from ours. We can perceive a considerable difference between rejecting a principle before, and after, a full discussion of it. It would be a far greater evil, in the present day, to persecute men for adhering to the dictates of their consciences, than it was before the rights of conscience were so fully understood. It may include a thousand degrees more guilt for this country, at the present time, to persist in the slave-trade, than to have done the same thing previous to the late inquiry on that business. But the disparity between periods with regard to the light thrown upon these subjects, is much less than between the periods before and after the death of Christ, with regard to the light thrown upon that subject. The difference between the periods, before and after the death of Christ, was as great as between a period in which a prophecy is unaccomplished, and that in which it is accomplished. There are many things that seem plain in prophecy, when the event is past, which cannot then be honestly denied ; and it may seem wonderful that they should ever have been overlooked or mistaken ; yet

overlooked, or mistaken they have been, and that by men of solid understanding and real piety.

It was after the death of Christ, when the means of knowledge began to diffuse light around them, that the disciples were for the first time reproved for their *slowness of heart to believe*, in reference to this subject. It was after the death and resurrection of Christ, when the way of salvation was fully and clearly pointed out, that those who stumbled at the doctrine of the cross were reckoned *disobedient*, in such a degree as to denominate them unbelievers, and that the most awful warnings and threatenings were pointed against them as *treading under foot the blood of the Son of God*. It is true, our Lord had repeatedly predicted his death, and it was faulty in the disciples not to understand and believe it; yet what he taught on that subject was but little, when compared with what followed. The *great salvation*, as the apostle to the Hebrews expresses it, *first began to be spoken by the Lord*, and was *confirmed* to the primitive christians *by those who heard him*: but then it is added, *God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will*. Now, it is upon this accumulation of evidence that he asks, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation !**

A belief in the *resurrection* of Christ is allowed on all hands to be essential to salvation; as it is an event, upon which the truth of christianity rests.† But the disciples of Christ, previous to the event, were as much in the dark on this article as on that of the atonement. Even to the last, when he was actually risen from the dead, they visited his tomb in hope of finding him, and could scarcely believe their senses with respect to his

* Heb. ii. 1—4. † 1 Cor. xiv. 14, 15. Rom. x. 9.

having left it : *for as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.* Now if the resurrection of Christ, though but little understood before the event, may after it be considered as essential to christianity ; there is no reason to conclude but that the same may be said of his atonement.

Thirdly : It is not clear that the disciples did reject the doctrine of a vicarious sacrifice. They had all their lives been accustomed to vicarious sacrifices : it is, therefore, very improbable, that they should be prejudiced against the idea itself. Their objection to Christ's laying down his life, seems to have been directed simply against his *dying*, rather than against his dying as a *vicarious* sacrifice. Could they have been reconciled to the former, for any thing that appears, they would have readily acquiesced in the latter. Their objection to the death of Christ seems to have been more the effect of ignorance and misguided affection, than of a rooted opposition of principle : and therefore when they came to see clearly into the design of his death, it is expressed not as if they had essentially altered their sentiments, but *remembered the words which he had spoken to them* ; of which, while their minds were beclouded with the notions of a temporal kingdom, they could form no clear or consistent ideas, and therefore had forgotten them.*

And notwithstanding the ignorance and error which attended the disciples, there are things said of them which imply much more than the objection would seem to allow :—*Whither I go*, saith Christ, *ye know ; and the way ye know.* As if he should say, I am not going to a strange place, but to the house of my Father and of your Father ; with the way to which you are acquainted, and therefore will soon be with

* Luke xxvi. 6—8.

me. *Thomas said unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way? Jesus said unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me—If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.**

From this passage it appears, that the disciples had a general idea of salvation through Christ; though they did not understand particularly how it was to be accomplished. Farther: Christ taught his hearers, saying, *Except ye eat my flesh, and drink my blood, ye have no life in you—and the bread that I will give is my flesh, that I will give for the life of the world.* On this occasion many of his nominal disciples were offended, and *walked no more with him*; but the true disciples were not offended. On the contrary, being asked, *Will ye also go away? Peter answered, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.†* From this passage, it plainly appears, that the true disciples of Christ were even at that time considered as believing so much on the subject of Christ's giving himself for the life of the world, as to *eat his flesh and drink his blood*; for our Lord certainly did not mean to condemn them as having *no life in them*. So far were they from *rejecting* this doctrine, that the same words at which the false disciples were offended, were to them *the words of eternal life*. Probably this great truth was sometimes more and sometimes less apparent to their view. At those periods in which their minds were occupied with the notion of a temporal kingdom, or in which events turned up contrary to their expectations, they would be all in darkness concerning it; yet, with all their darkness, and with all their doubts, it does not

* John xiv. 4—7.

† John vi. 51—68.

appear to be a doctrine which they can be said to have *rejected*.

No person, I think, who is open to conviction can be a bigot, whatever be his religious sentiments. Our opponents, it is true, are very ready to suppose that this is our general character, and that we are averse to free inquiry; but this may be more than they are able to prove. We acknowledge that we do not choose to circulate books indiscriminately among our friends, which are considered by us as containing false and pernicious doctrines; neither do other people. I never knew a zealous dissenter eager to circulate a book containing high-church principles among his children and connections; nor a churchman those which contain the true principles of dissent. In like manner, an Anti-trinitarian will not propagate the best productions of Trinitarians. If they happen to meet with a weak performance, in which the subject is treated to disadvantage, they may feel no great objection to make it public; but it is otherwise with respect to those in which it is treated to advantage. I have known some gentlemen affecting to possess what has been called a liberal mind, who have discovered no kind of concern at the indiscriminate circulation of Socinian productions; but I have also perceived that those gentlemen have not been far from their kingdom of heaven. If any person choose to read the writings of a Socinian, or of an atheist, he is at liberty to do so: but as the *Monthly Reviewers* themselves observe, "Though we are always ready to engage in inquiries after truth, and wish to see them at all times promoted; yet we choose to avoid disseminating notions which we cannot approve."*

As to being open to conviction *ourselves*, it has been frequently observed, that Socinians discover as

* *Monthly Review Enlarged*, Vol. vi. page 555.

great an aversion to the reading of our writings, as we can discover to the reading of theirs. Some will read them; but not many. Out of a hundred persons, whose minds lean towards the Socinian system, should you put into their hands a well-written Calvinistic performance, and desire them carefully and seriously to read it over, I question whether five would comply with your request. So far however as my observation extends, I can perceive in such persons an eagerness for reading those writings which suit their taste, and a contempt of others, equal, if not superior, to what is perceivable in people of other denominations.

Dr. Priestley suggests, that the importance which we give to our sentiments tends to prevent an earnest and impartial search after truth. "While they imbibe such a notion of their present sentiments, they must needs (he says) live in the dread of all free inquiry; whereas we, who have not that idea of the importance of our present sentiments, preserve a state of mind proper for the discussion of them. If we be wrong, as our minds are under no strong bias, we are within the reach of conviction; and thus are in the way to grow wiser and better as long as we live."*

Mr. Belsham, however, appears to think the very reverse. He pleads, and I think very justly, that an idea of the non-importance of sentiment tends to destroy a spirit of inquiry, by becalming the mind into a state of indifference and carelessness. He complains of those of his own party (the Socinians) who maintain that sincerity is every thing, that nothing is of much value but an honest heart, and that speculative opinions, the cant name for those interesting doctrines, which the wise and good in every age have thought worthy of the

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* Consider. on Differ. of Opin. § II.

most serious discussion, that these speculative opinions, as they are opprobriously called, are of little use. What is this, (adds he) but to pass a severe censure upon those illustrious names, whose acute and learned labours have been successfully employed in clearing up the difficulties in which these important subjects were involved, to condemn their own conduct in wasting so much of their time and pains upon such useless speculations, and to check the progress of religious inquiry and christian knowledge? Were I a friend to the popular maxim, That speculative opinions are of no importance, I would endeavour to act consistent with my principles: I would content myself with believing as my fathers believed; I would take no pains to acquire or diffuse knowledge: I would laugh at every attempt to instruct and to meliorate the world: I would treat as a visionary and a fool every one who should aim to extend the limits of science; I would recommend to my fellow-creatures that they should neither lie nor defraud, that they should neither swear falsely nor steal, should say their prayers as they have been taught; but, as to any thing else, that they need not give themselves any concern; for that honesty was every thing, and that every expectation of improving their circumstances, by cultivating their understandings and extending their views, would prove delusive and chimerical.”*

None will imagine that I have quoted Mr. Belsham on account of my agreement with him in the great principles of the gospel. What he would reckon important truth, I should consider as pernicious error: and, probably, his views of the importance of what he accounts truth, are not equal to what I have attempted to maintain. But in this general principle we are

* Sermon on the Importance of Truth, pp. 5, 6.

agreed: *That our conceiving of truth as being of but little importance, has a tendency to check free inquiry rather than promote it*; which is the reverse of what we are taught by Dr. Priestley.

To illustrate the subject more fully: Suppose the possession of a precious stone, of a certain description, to entitle us to the possession of some very desirable object; and suppose that none of any other description would answer the same end; Would that consideration tend to prejudice our minds in favour of *any* stone we might happen to possess, or prevent an impartial and strict inquiry into its properties? Would it not rather induce us to be more inquisitive and careful, lest we should be mistaken, and so lose the prize? If, on the other hand, we could imagine, that any stone would answer the same end, or that an error in that matter were of trifling importance as to the issue, would it not have a tendency to promote a spirit of carelessness in our examinations; and as all men are apt in such cases to be prejudiced in favour of what they already have, to make us rest contented with what we had in possession; be it what it might?

It is allowed, however, that as every good has its counterfeit, and as there is a mixture of human prejudices and passions in all we think or do, there is danger of this principle degenerating into an unchristian severity; and of its being exercised at the expense of that benevolence which is due to all men. There is nothing, however, in this view of things, which in its own nature tends to promote these evils: for the most unfavourable opinion of a man's principles and state, may consist with the most perfect benevolence and compassion towards his person. Jesus Christ thought as ill of the principles and state of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the generality of the Jewish nation, as any of us think of one another; yet he wept over Jerusalem, and

to his last hour sought her welfare. The apostle Paul had the same conception of the principles and state of the generality of his countrymen as Christ himself had, and much the same as we have of the Socinians. He considered them, though they *followed after the law of righteousness*, or were very devout in their way, yet as *not having attained to the law of righteousness*; in other words, as not being *righteous* persons; which the Gentiles, who submitted to the gospel, were. And *wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law! For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.** Yet Paul in the same chapter, and in the most solemn manner, declared, that he had *great heaviness, and continual sorrow in his heart—*Nay, that *he could wish himself accursed from Christ, for his brethren's sake, his kinsmen according to the flesh!*

But why need I say any more? Dr. Priestley himself allows all I plead for: “The man (says he) whose sole spring of action is *a concern for lost souls*, and a care to preserve the purity of that gospel which alone teaches the most effectual method of their recovery from *the power of sin and Satan unto God*, will feel an ardour of mind that will prompt him strenuously to oppose all those whom he considers as obstructing his benevolent designs. (He adds) I could overlook every thing in a man, who, I thought, meant nothing but my everlasting welfare.”† This, and nothing else, is the temper of mind which I have been endeavouring to defend; and, as Dr. Priestley has here generously acknowledged its propriety, it becomes us to acknowledge, on the other hand, that every species of zeal for sentiments, in which a concern for the everlasting welfare of men is wanting, is an un-

* Rom. ix. 30—32.

† Differ. of Opinion. § i.

hallowed kind of fire ; for which whoever indulges it, will receive no thanks from Him, whose cause they may imagine themselves to have espoused.

I am, &c.

LETTER XI.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR INFLUENCE IN
PROMOTING THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

Christian Brethren,

IF the holy scriptures be a proper medium by which to judge of the nature of virtue, it must be allowed to include *the love of Christ* ; nay, that love to Christ is one of the cardinal virtues of the christian scheme ; seeing it occupies a most important place in the doctrines and precepts of inspiration. *He that loveth me, said Christ, shall be loved of my Father—If God were your Father, ye would love me—Whom having not seen, ye love : in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory—Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity—If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha.**

From these passages, with many others that might be produced, we may conclude that love to Christ, is not only a christian virtue, but essential to the very existence of christianity ; nay, to *morality* itself, if by that term be meant a conformity to the moral law. The following lines, though expressed by a poet, contain more than a poetic flight, even the words of truth and soberness :

“ Talk they of Morals ? O thou bleeding Love,
“ The grand morality is love of Thee !”

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* John xiv. 21. viii. 42.

1 Pet. i. 8.

Eph. vi. 24.

1 Cor. xvi. 22.

In judging which of the systems in question is most adapted to promote love to Christ, it should seem sufficient to determine, Which of them tends most to exalt his character—which places his mediation in the most important light—and which represents us as most indebted to his undertaking.

With respect to the *first*: Every being commands our affection, in proportion to the degree of intellect which he possesses; provided that his goodness be equal to his intelligence. We feel a respect towards an animal, and a concern at its death, which we do not feel towards a vegetable; towards those animals which are very sagacious, more than those which are otherwise; towards man, more than to mere animals; and towards men of enlarged powers, if they be but good as well as great, more than to men in common. According to the degree of intellect which they possess, so much they have of being, and of estimation in the scale of being. A man is of *more value than many sparrows*, and the life of David was reckoned to be worth ten thousand of those of the common people. It has been thought to be on this principle that God, possessing infinitely more existence than all the creatures taken together, and being as good as he is great, is to be loved and revered without bounds, except those which arise from the limitation of our powers; that is, *with all our heart, and soul, and mind and strength*.

Now, if these observations be just, it cannot be doubted which of the systems in question tends most to promote the love of Christ: that which supposes him to be equal, or one with God; or that which reduces him to the rank of a mere fellow-creature. In the same proportion as God himself is to be loved above

man, so is Christ to be loved, supposing him to be truly God, above what he is, or ought to be, supposing him to be merely a fellow-man.

The prophets, apostles, and primitive christians, seem to have felt this motive in all its force. Hence, in their various expressions of love to Christ, they frequently mingle acknowledgments of his divine dignity and excellency. They, indeed, never seem afraid of going too far, or of honouring him too much ; but dwell upon the dignity and glory of his person, as their darling theme. When David meditated upon this subject, he was raised above himself. *My heart, saith he, is enditing a good matter : I speak of the things which I have made touching the King : my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer ! Thou art fairer than the children of men—Thy throne, O GOD, is forever and ever : the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre—Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O MOST MIGHTY, with thy glory and thy majesty.* The expected Messiah was frequently the subject of Isaiah's prophecies. He loved him ; and his love appears to have been founded on his dignity and divine excellency. *Unto us a Child is born : unto us a Son is given ; and the government shall be upon his shoulders ; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, THE MIGHTY GOD, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace.* He thus describes the preaching of John the Baptist : *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of JEHOVAH, make straight in the desert a high way for OUR GOD—Behold the LORD GOD will come with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him ; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. HE shall feed his flock like a shepherd ; HE shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry*

them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.—Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, so loved the Messiah as to rejoice in his own child chiefly because he was appointed to be his prophet and forerunner. *And thou child, said the enraptured parent, shall be called the prophet of THE HIGHEST: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.** John the Baptist himself, when the Jews artfully endeavoured to excite his jealousy on account of the superior ministerial success of Christ, replied; *Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said I am not the Christ—HE THAT COMETH FROM ABOVE IS ABOVE ALL: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: HE THAT COMETH FROM HEAVEN IS ABOVE ALL.†*

The apostles, who saw the Lord, and who saw the accomplishment of what the prophets foretold, were not disappointed in him. Their love to him was great, and their representations of his person and character ran in the same exalted strain. *In the beginning was the Word, said the beloved disciple, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things WERE MADE BY HIM, AND WITHOUT HIM WAS NOT ANY THING MADE THAT WAS MADE. He was in the world, and THE WORLD WAS MADE BY HIM, and the world knew him not. And*

* Ps. xlv. 1—6. Isa. ix. 6. xl. 3, 10, 11. Luke i. 76.

† John iii. 28—31. Query. In what sense could Christ be said to come from *above*, even from *heaven*, if he was merely a man, and came into the world like other men? It could not be on account of his *office*, or of receiving his mission from God; for, in that sense, John was from heaven as well as he. Was it not for the same reason which John elsewhere gives for his being *preferred before him*; viz. that **HE WAS BEFORE HIM**? John i. 15, 30.

the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of THE ONLY BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER) full of grace and truth.—Thomas insisted upon an unreasonable kind of evidence of the resurrection of his Lord from the dead; saying, *Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my fingers into the print of the nails, and thrust my hands into his side, I will not believe.* When reproved, by our Lord's offering to gratify him in his incredulous proposal, he confessed, with a mixture of shame, grief, and affection, that however unbelieving he had been, he was now satisfied that it was indeed his Lord, and no other, saying, **MY LORD, AND MY GOD!**—The whole Epistle to the Hebrews breathes an ardent love to Christ, and is intermingled with the same kind of language. Jesus is there represented as **UPHOLDING ALL THINGS BY THE WORD OF HIS POWER**: as the object of **ANGELIC ADORATION**: as he to whom it was said, **THY THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER**: as he who **LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH**, and concerning whom it is added, **THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORK OF THINE HANDS**: as superior to Moses, the one being the **BUILDER and OWNER of the house**, even **GOD that built all things**; and the other, only a servant in it: as superior to Aaron and to all those of his order, **A GREAT high priest, Jesus THE SON OF GOD**: and finally, as infinitely superior to angels; for, *to which of the angels, said he at any time, THOU ART MY SON? or, SIT ON MY RIGHT HAND?* Hence the gospel is considered as exhibiting **A GREAT salvation**; and those who *neglect* it, are exposed to a recompense of wrath which they *shall not escape*.*

* John i. 1, 2, 3, 14. xx. 24—28. Heb. i. 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13. iii. 3, 4, 5, 6. iv. 14. ii. 3.

Paul could scarcely mention the name of Christ, without adding some strong encomium or other in his praise. When he was enumerating those things which rendered his countrymen dear to him, he mentions their being *Israelites*, to whom pertained the *adoption*, and the *glory*, and the *covenants*, and the *giving of the law*, and the *service of God*, and the *promises*; whose were the *fathers*, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, *Christ came*. Here, it seems, he might have stopped; but, having mentioned the name of Christ, he could not content himself without adding, **WHO IS OVER ALL, GOD BLESSED FOREVER. Amen.** Having occasion also to speak of him in his Epistle to the Colossians, as *God's dear Son, in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins*; he could not forbear adding, *Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature. For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created BY him, and FOR him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist !**

And now, brethren, I might appeal to you on the justness of Dr. Priestley's assertion, that "In no sense whatever, not even in the lowest of all, is Christ so much as called *God* in all the New Testament."† I might appeal to you, whether such language as the above would ever have proceeded from the sacred writers, had they embraced the scheme of our opponents. But, waving these particulars as irrelative to the immediate point in hand, I appeal to you whether such love as the prophets and apostles expressed towards Christ, could consist with his being merely a fellow-creature,

* Rom. ix. 4, 5—Col i. 13—17.

† Letters to Mr. Burn, Let. i.

and their considering him as such ; whether the manner in which they expressed that love, upon the principles of our opponents, instead of being acceptable to God, could have been any other than the height of extravagance, and the essence of idolatry ? Judge also for yourselves, brethren, which of the systems in question has the greatest tendency to promote such a spirit of love to Christ as is here exemplified : that which leads us to admire these representations, and on various occasions to adopt the same expressions ; or that which employs us in coldly criticising away their meaning : that which leads us without fear to give them their full scope ; or that which, while we are honouring the Son, would excite apprehensions lest we should in so doing dishonour the Father ?

The next question to be discussed is, *Which of the two systems places the mediation of Christ in the most important point of light ?* That system, doubtless, which finds the greatest use for Christ, or in which he occupies the *most important place*, must have the greatest tendency to promote love to him. Suppose a system of politics were drawn up, in which *civil liberty* occupied but a very small portion, and was generally kept out of view ; or if, when brought forward, it was either for the purpose of abating the high notions which some people entertain of it, or at least, of treating it as a matter not absolutely necessary to good civil government ; who would venture to assert, that such a system was friendly, or its abettors friends, to civil liberty ? This is manifestly a case in point. The Socinian system has but little use for Christ ; and none at all, as an atoning sacrifice. It scarcely ever mentions him, unless it be to depreciate those views of his dignity which others entertain ; or in such a way as to set aside the absolute necessity of his mediation.

It is not so in our view of things. We find so much use for Christ, if I may so speak, that he appears as the *soul* which animates the whole body of our divinity ; as the centre of the system, diffusing light and life to every part of it. Take away CHRIST ; nay, take away the Deity and atonement of Christ, and the whole ceremonial of the Old Testament appears to us little more than a dead mass of uninteresting matter : prophecy loses almost all that is interesting and endearing ; the gospel is annihilated, or ceases to be that *good news* to lost sinners which it professes to be ; practical religion is divested of its most powerful motives ; the evangelical dispensation of its peculiar glory ; and heaven itself of its most transporting joys.

The sacred penmen appear to have written all along upon the same principles. They considered CHRIST as the *All in all* of their religion ; and, as such, they loved him with their whole hearts. Do they speak of the *first tabernacle* ? They call it a *figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience—But CHRIST being come a High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building ; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.* Do they speak of prophecy ? They call the testimony of Jesus the *spirit* of it. Of the gospel ? it is the doctrine of *Christ crucified*. Of the medium by which the world was crucified to them, and they to the world ? It is the same. The very *reproach of Christ* had a value stamped upon it, so as, in their esteem, to surpass all the treasures of the present world. One of the most affecting ideas which they afford us of heaven, consists

in ascribing everlasting glory and dominion *to him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. Ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands* were heard *with a loud voice, saying, WORTHY IS THE LAMB THAT WAS SLAIN, TO RECEIVE POWER, AND RICHES, AND WISDOM, AND STRENGTH, AND HONOUR, AND GLORY, AND BLESSING !**

Let us select a particular instance in the character of Paul. This apostle seemed to be swallowed up in love to Christ. His mercy to him as one of the *chief of sinners*, had bound his heart to him with bonds of everlasting gratitude. Nor was this all; he saw that glory in his person, office, and work, which eclipsed the excellence of all created objects, which crucified the world to him, and him unto the world. *What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things.* Nor did he now repent; for he immediately adds, *And do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him; not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith—That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.* When his friends wept because he would not be dissuaded from going up to Jerusalem, he answered, *What mean ye to weep, and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, FOR THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS!* Feeling in himself an ardent love to Christ, he vehemently desired that others might love

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* Heb. ix. 9—11. Rev. xix. 10. 1 Cor. i. 23. Gal. vi. 14.

Heb. xi. 26. Rev. v. 11 12.

him too. *For this cause he bowed his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* in behalf of the Ephesians; praying that CHRIST might dwell in their hearts by faith. He represented him to them as the medium of all spiritual blessings; of *election, adoption, acceptance with God, redemption, and the forgiveness of sins*: of a future inheritance, and of a present earnest of it; as *Head over all things to the church*, and as *him that FILLETH ALL IN ALL*. He described him as the only way of *access to God*, and as the sole foundation of a sinner's hope; whose riches were *unsearchable*, and the dimensions of his love *passing knowledge*.*

If any drew back, or deviated from the simplicity of the gospel, he felt a most ardent thirst for their recovery: witness his epistle to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and (if, as is generally supposed, he was the writer of it) to the Hebrews. If any one drew back, and were not to be reclaimed, he denounced against him the divine declaration, *My soul shall have no pleasure in him!* And whatever might be the mind of others, like Joshua he was at a point himself: *Henceforth*, he exclaims, *let no man trouble me; for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus*. If he wished to *live*, it was for Christ; or, if to *die*, it was to be with him. He invoked the best of blessings on those who loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; and denounced an *anathema maranatha* on those who loved him not.†

The reason why I have quoted all these passages is, to show that the primitive gospel was *full of Christ*; or, that Christ was, as it were, the centre and the life of the evangelical system; and that this, its leading and

* Phil. iii. 7—10. Acts xxi. 13. Eph. ch. i, ii, iii.

† Heb. x. 38. Gal. vi. 17. Phil. i. 20, 21. Eph. vi. 24. 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

principal characteristic, tended wonderfully to promote the love of Christ. Now, brethren, let me appeal to you again: Which of the systems in question is it, which resembles that of the apostles in this particular, and consequently has the greatest tendency to promote love to Christ? That of which Christ is the *All in all*; or that in which he is scarcely ever introduced, except for the purpose of representing him as a “mere fellow creature, a fallible and peccable man?”

The *Third*, and last question to be discussed, (if, indeed, it need any discussion) is, *Which of the two systems represents us as most indebted to Christ's undertaking?* Our Lord himself has laid it down as an incontrovertible rule, that *those who have much forgiven, will love him much; and that those who have little forgiven, will love him but little.* That system, therefore, which supposes us the greatest debtors to forgiving love, must needs have the greatest tendency to promote a return of love.

Our views with respect to *the depravity of human nature* are such, that, upon our system, we have much more to be forgiven, than our opponents have upon theirs. We suppose ourselves to have been utterly depraved; our very nature totally corrupted; and, consequently, that all our supposed virtues, while our hearts were at enmity with God, were not virtue in reality, but destitute of its very essence. We do not, therefore, conceive of ourselves, during our unregeneracy, as having been merely *stained* by a few *imperfections*; but as *altogether polluted*, by a course of apostacy from God, and black rebellion against him. That which is called *sin* by our opponents, must consist chiefly, if not entirely, in the irregularity of a man's outward conduct, else they could not suppose, as Dr. Priestley does, that “Virtue bears the same proportion to vice, that happi-

ness does to misery, or health to sickness, in the world.”* That is, that there is much more of the former than of the latter. But the merely outward irregularities of men bear no more proportion to the whole of their depravity, according to our views of it, than the particles of water which are occasionally emitted from the surface of the ocean, to the tide that rolls beneath. The religion of those who make sin to consist in little besides exterior irregularities, or who conceive of the virtues of men as greatly exceeding their vices, appears to us to resemble the religion of Paul, previous to his conversion to christianity. While he thought of nothing but the irregularities of his exterior conduct, his virtues, doubtless, appeared to him to outweigh his vices; and, therefore, he concluded all was well; that he was in a fair way to everlasting happiness; or, as he himself expresses it, *alive without the law*. But when, through the glass of that divine *commandment* which prohibits the very inclination to evil, he saw the corruption that reigned within, transgression assumed a very different appearance: It was then a mighty ocean, that swelled, and swept off all his legal hopes. *Sin revived, and he died*. In short, our views of human depravity induce us to consider ourselves, by nature, as *unworthy*; as *lost*, and *ready to perish*; so that if we are saved at all, it must be by rich grace, and by a great Saviour. I scarcely need to draw the conclusion, That, having, according to our system, most to be forgiven, we shall, if we truly enter into it, love most.

Further: Our system supposes a much greater malignity in sin, than that of our opponents. When we speak of sin, we do not love to deal, as Mr. Belsham does, in extenuating names. We find no authority for calling it “human frailty;” or for affixing any

* Let. to a Phil. Unb. Vol. i. Let. v.

idea to it that shall represent us rather as objects worthy of the compassion of God, than as subjects of that which his soul abhorreth. We do not see how Mr. Belsham, or those of his sentiments, while they speak of moral evil in so diminutive a style, can possibly conceive of it after the manner of the inspired writers, as an *evil and bitter thing*; or, as it is expressed in that remarkable phrase of the apostle Paul, *exceeding sinful*.*

Our opponents deny sin to be in any sense an infinite evil; or, which is the same thing, deserving of endless punishment; or that such punishment will follow upon it. Nobody, indeed, supposes that sin is *in all respects* infinite. As committed by a finite creature, and admitting of different degrees, it must be finite, and will doubtless be punished hereafter with different degrees of punishment; but, as committed against a God of infinite excellence, and as tending to infinite anarchy and mischief, it must be infinite. All that is meant, I suppose, by calling sin an infinite evil, is, that it is deserving of endless punishment; and this can never be fairly objected to as an absurdity.

* The expression, *exceeding sinful*, is very forcible. It resembles the phrase, *far more exceeding*, or rather *excessively exceeding*, in 2 Cor. iv. 7. It seems that the holy Spirit himself could not find a worse name for sin than its own. If we speak of a treacherous person we call him a *Judas*: if of Judas, we call him a *devil*; but if of Satan, we want a comparison, because we can find none that is worse than himself. We must therefore say as Christ did, *When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own*. It was thus with the Apostle when speaking of the evil of his own heart, *That sin by the commandment might become—what? He wanted a name worse than its own—he could not find one—he therefore unites a strong epithet to the thing itself, calling it exceeding sinful.*

If there be no absurdity in the immortality of a sinner's existence, there is none in supposing him to deserve a punishment, be it in what degree it may, that shall run commensurate with it. There is no absurdity in supposing a sinner to have been guilty of such crimes as to deserve misery for as long a duration as he is capable of sustaining it. But whatever may be said, as to the truth or falsehood of this sentiment, thus much is clear, that in proportion as our opponents conceive diminutively of the evil of sin, they diminish the grace of forgiveness; and if that forgiveness come to us through Christ (as is plainly implied in their loving *him* most who have most forgiven) it must needs follow, that in the same proportion the love of Christ is sapped at the foundation.

Once more: The *expense* at which we suppose our forgiveness to have been obtained, is a consideration which endears to us both the gift and the Giver. We do not conceive of Christ, in his bestowment of this blessing upon us, as presenting us with that which cost him nothing. If the portion given by Jacob to his son Joseph was heightened and endeared by its being obtained *by the sword and the bow*; much more is a title to eternal life, by its being obtained through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is this that attracts the hearts of those who are described as singing a new song to their Redeemer, *Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.*

It does not appear, from any thing I have seen, that the system of our opponents can, with any plausibility, be pretended to equal ours respecting love to Christ. All that can be alleged, with any colour of reason, all however, that I have noticed is this; that in proportion as we, in this way, furnish motives of love to Christ,

we detract from those of love to the Father, by diminishing the freeness of his grace, and exhibiting him as one that was incapable of bestowing forgiveness, unless a price was paid for it. To this it is replied: If the incapacity of the Father, to shew mercy without an atonement, consisted in a want of love, or any thing of natural implacability, or even a reluctance to the bestowment of mercy, there would be force in the objection: but if it be no other than the incapacity of a righteous Governor, who, whatever good will he may have to an offender, cannot bear the thought of passing by the offence without some public expression of displeasure against it; that while mercy triumphs, it may not be at the expense of law, of equity and of the general good; such an incapacity rather infers a perfection than an imperfection in his nature, and instead of diminishing our regard for his character, must have a powerful tendency to increase it.

I am, &c.

LETTER XII.

ON VENERATION FOR THE SCRIPTURES.

Christian Brethren,

IF we may judge of the nature of true piety, by the examples of the prophets and holy men of old, we may conclude, with certainty, that an affectionate attachment to the Holy Scriptures, as the rule of faith and practice, enters deeply into the spirit of it. The Holy Scriptures were described by David, under the names of the *word, statutes, laws, precepts, judgments, and testimonies* of God; and to these all through the Psalms, especially in the 119th, he professes a most ardent attachment. Such language as the following was very

common with him, as well as others of the Old Testament writers ; *Oh how I love thy law !—Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path—Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law—My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times—Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart—Thy statutes have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage—The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver.*

Dr. Priestley often professes great regard for the sacred writings, and is very severe on Mr. Burn, for suggesting that he denied “ the infallibility of the apostolic testimony, concerning the person of Christ.” He also tells Dr. Price, “ No man can pay a higher regard to *proper* scripture authority than I do.” We may therefore take it for granted, that a regard for the authority of scripture is a virtue ; a virtue that our opponents, as well as we, would be thought to possess.

I wish in this Letter to inquire, supposing the sacred writers to have been honest and good men, What a regard to the *proper* authority of their writings includes, and to compare it with the avowed sentiments of our adversaries. By these means, brethren, you may be the better able to judge for yourselves, whether the spirit which animates the whole body of the Socinian divinity does not breathe a language unfriendly to the sacred writings, and carry in it something hostile to *every thought being subdued to the obedience of Christ.*

In order to judge of a regard for proper scriptural authority, it is necessary in the first place, to have recourse to the *professions* of the sacred writers concerning what they wrote. If any man venerate the authority of scripture, he must receive it as BEING WHAT IT

PROFESSES TO BE, AND FOR ALL THE PURPOSES FOR WHICH IT PROFESSĒS TO BE WRITTEN. If the scriptures profess to be divinely inspired, and assume to be the infallible standard of faith and practice, we must either receive them as such ; or, if we would be consistent, disown the writers as impostors.

The professions of the sacred writers are as follow : *The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue : the God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me—Thus saith the Lord—And Jehoshaphat stood, and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established ; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.**

New Testament writers bear ample testimony to the inspiration of those under the Old Testament. *All scripture is given by inspiration of God ; and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works—No prophecy of the scripture is of private interpretation—it is not to be considered as the private opinion of a fallible man, as is the case with other productions—for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.†*

Nor did the New-Testament writers bear testimony to the inspiration of the prophets only, but considered *their own writings* as equally inspired : *If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.* Peter ranks the epistles of Paul with *other scriptures.*‡ There seems to have

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 2, 3. Isai. xliii. 1. 2 Chron. xx. 20.

† 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. 2 Pet. i. 20, 21. ‡ 1 Cor. xiv. 37. 2 Pet. iii. 16.

been one instance in which Paul disowned his having received any *commandment from the Lord*, and in which he proceeded to give his own private *judgment* :* but this appears to have been a particular exception from a general rule, of which notice was expressly given ; an exception, therefore, which tends to strengthen rather than weaken the argument for apostolic inspiration.

As the sacred writers considered themselves as divinely inspired, so they represented their writings as the infallible test of divine truth, to which all appeals were to be made, and by which every controversy in religious matters was to be decided. *To the law, and to the testimony ; if they speak not according to this rule, it is because there is no light in them—These are the true sayings of God—That which is noted in the scriptures of truth—What saith the scriptures ?—Search the scriptures ; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me—The Bereans searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so.†*

The sacred writers did not spare to denounce the most awful judgments against those who should either pervert their writings, add to them, or detract from them. Those who wrested the apostolic epistles, are said to have *wrested them, as they did the other scriptures, to their own destruction—Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let them be accursed—Whatever thing I command you, observe and do it ; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it—If any man shall add unto these things, God*

* 1 Cor. vii. 25. † Isa. viii. 20. Rev. xix. 9. Dan. x. 21.

Rom. iv. 3. John v. 39. Acts xvii. 11.

shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life.*"—Nothing short of the most perfect divine inspiration could justify such language as this, or secure those who used it from the charge of bold presumption and base imposition.

Dr. Priestley often professes great regard for the scriptures; and, as has been observed before, is very severe on Mr. Burn, for representing him as denying "the infallibility of the apostolic testimony concerning the person of Christ." Far be it from me to wish to represent the sentiments of Dr. Priestley in an unfair manner, or in such a light as he himself could justly disavow. All I mean to do, is, to quote a passage or two from his own writings, and add a few remarks upon them.

Speaking in favour of reverence for the sacred writings, he says, "Not that I consider the books of scripture as *inspired*, and on that account entitled to this high degree of respect, but as authentic records of the dispensations of God to mankind, with every particular of which we cannot be too well acquainted."

Again: "If you wish to know what, in my opinion, a christian is bound to believe with respect to the *scriptures*, I answer, that the books which are universally received as *authentic*, are to be considered as faithful records of past transactions, and especially the account of the intercourse which the Divine Being has kept up with mankind from the beginning of the world to the time of our Saviour, and his apostles. No christian is answerable for more than this. The writers of the books of scripture were *men*, and therefore *fallible*; but

* 2 Peter, iii. 16. Gal. i. 8. Deut. xii. 23. Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

all that we have to do with them is in the character of *historians* and *witnesses* of what they heard and saw. Of course their credibility is to be estimated like that of other historians ; viz. from the circumstances in which they wrote, as with respect to their opportunities of knowing the truth of what they relate, and the biasses to which they might be subject. Like all other historians, they were liable to mistakes, with respect to things of small moment, because they might not give sufficient attention to them ; and with respect to their *reasoning*, we are fully at liberty to judge of it as well as that of any other men, by a due consideration of the propositions they advance, and the arguments they allege. For it by no means follows, because a man has had communications with the Deity for certain purposes, and he may be depended upon with respect to his account of those communications, that he is in other respects more wise and knowing than other men.”*

“You say, (says he, in his *Letters to Dr. Price*) That I do not allow of scriptural authority ; but, indeed, my friend, you should have expressed yourself with more caution. No man can pay a higher regard to *proper* scriptural authority, than I do ; but neither I, nor I presume yourself, believe implicitly every thing that is advanced by any writer in the Old or New Testament. I believe all the writers, without exception, to have been men of the greatest probity, and to have been well informed of every thing of consequence of which they treat ; but at the same time I believe them to have been *men*, and consequently *fallible*, and liable to mistake with respect to things to which they had not given much attention, or concerning which they had not the means of exact information ; which I take to be the case with respect to the account that

* Let. to a Phil. Unb. Part ii. pref. p. 13. also Let. v.

Moses has given of the creation and the fall of man." In a late performance, entitled, *Letters to the Philosophers and Politicians of France*, Dr. Priestley speaks much in the same strain. "That the books of scripture (he says) were written by particular divine inspiration, is a thing to which the writers themselves make no pretensions. It is a notion destitute of all proof, and that has done great injury to the evidence of christianity."*

From this account, taken all together, you will observe, brethren, that Dr. Priestley does not believe either the Old or the New Testament to be *divinely inspired*; to be so inspired as that he is "bound implicitly to believe every thing (and might he not have added, *any thing?*) which the writers of those books advance." He believes, that the scriptures, instead of being *the rule of faith and practice*, are only "faithful records of past transactions:" and that no authority attends them, except what attends the writings of any other honest and well informed historian; nor even that, in many cases: for he maintains, that "no christian is bound to consider any of the books of scripture as faithful records of past transactions, unless they have been *universally* received as authentic." That is, if any person, at least any considerable number of persons, at any period, have thought proper to dispute the authenticity of any of these writings, that part immediately ceases to have any claim upon posterity, and may be rejected with impunity. And even those writers, whose works upon the whole are allowed as authentic, are supposed to have written upon subjects "to which they had not given much attention, and concerning which they were not possessed of sufficient means of

information ;” and, consequently, in those cases are not to be regarded. This is the whole of what he means by “*proper* scriptural authority.” This is the ground on which, while he speaks of the sacred writers as *fallible*, he, nevertheless, maintains the infallibility of their testimony concerning the person of Christ. He does not pretend to say the apostles were inspired in that article, though not in others ; but merely that this was a case in which, by the mere exercise of their senses, they were competent to decide, and even certain of deciding right. Whether these notions of *proper* scriptural authority will accord with the foregoing *professions*, I leave you to judge ; also, if Dr. Priestley’s views be right, whether the sacred writers, professing what they did, could be men of the “greatest probity.”

You will observe further, that the fallibility which Dr. Priestley imputes to the sacred writers, as being *men*, must rest upon this principle ; That it is impossible for God himself so to inspire a *man* as to preserve him from error, without destroying his nature ; and as he considers Christ as a mere *man*, perhaps it is on this principle that he maintains him to be “fallible and peccable.” Yet he has never been able to produce one example in which he has actually failed. But it should seem very extraordinary for a fallible and peccable man to go through the world in such a manner, that his worst enemies could not convict him of a single failure, nor accuse him of any sin. If this matter be capable of proof, let Dr. Priestley prove it. Though the Jews declined the challenge, yet it is possible that he may possess sufficient “magnanimity” to accept it.*

* When Dr. Priestley charges the Mosaic history of the creation and fall of man with being a *lame account*, it was imputed to his *magnanimity*.

Further : You will observe that the *infallibility* which Dr. Priestley ascribes to the apostolic testimony concerning the person of Christ, implies that every historian is infallible in similar circumstances. His reasoning supposes, that if a sensible and upright historian have the proper means of information, and pay attention to his subject, he is infallible : but is this a fact ? It certainly has not been usual for us to consider historians in this light. We commonly suppose, that amidst the most ample means of information and the greatest attention, that uninspired men (who all have their prejudices and imperfections) are ever known to pay to a subject, they are liable to mistakes. Dr. Priestley has written a treatise in which he has declared for the doctrine of *Materialism* ; and, I suppose, he would be thought to have paid attention to it, and to have possessed the means of information as far as the nature of the subject will admit : yet, I imagine, he does not pretend in that article to infallibility.

If it be objected, that the nature of the subjects is different, and that the apostles were capable of arriving to a greater degree of certainty concerning the person of Christ, than Dr. Priestley could obtain on the subject of *Materialism* ; I answer, This appears to me to be more easily asserted than proved. Dr. Priestley, indeed, tells us, “ They were as capable of judging whether he was a *man*, as whether John the Baptist was one.” This is very true ; and if the question were, *Whether he was a man* ; it might be to the purpose. But at this time of day, however some of the humble followers of Dr. Priestley may amuse themselves in circulating pamphlets, proving that Jesus Christ was a man, and that with a view to convert the Trinitarians ; yet he himself cannot be insensible, that a *Materialist* might with just as much propriety gravely go about

to prove that men have material bodies.* Supposing Christ to have been merely a man, this was a matter that could not be visible to the eyes of the apostles. How could they judge by his exterior appearance whether he was merely a man, or both God and man? The august personages that appeared to Abraham, to Lot, and to Jacob, are called *men*; nor was there any thing that we know of, in their exterior appearance, different from other men; yet it does not follow from hence that they were merely human. God, in the above instances, assumed the appearance of a man; and how could the disciples be certain that all this might not be preparatory to his becoming really incarnate? It is true, our Lord might have told them that he was merely a man, and, in that case, they might have been said to be certain of it; but if so, it was either in some private instructions, or else in the words which they have recorded in their writings. We cannot say it was impossible for the apostles to mistake respecting the person of Christ, owing to their private instructions; because that would be building upon a foundation of which we are confessedly ignorant: neither can we affirm it on account of any of those words of Christ to his disciples which are *recorded*: for we have those words as well as they; and it might as well be said of us, as of them, that “it is impossible for us

* When Socinian writers have produced a list of texts, which prove the proper humanity of Christ, they seem to think their work is done. Our writers reply; We never questioned his humanity. If you attempt to prove any thing, prove to us that he was *merely* human.—Here our opponents, feeling themselves pinched, it should seem, for want of evidence, have been known to lose their temper. It is on this occasion that Mr. Lindsey is reduced to the necessity of *abusing* and *insulting* his opponents, instead of answering their arguments. *Catechist, Enquiry* vi. quoted towards the latter end of Let. viii.

to be under any mistake upon the subject." We might as well, therefore, allow what Dr. Priestley says to be infallible on the question, whether men have souls, or not, as what the apostles say (if we give up their inspiration) on the question, whether Christ was divine or not; for the one is as much an object of the senses as the other.

I cannot conceive of any foundation for the above assertion, unless it be upon the supposition of a union of the divine and human natures being *in itself impossible*. Then, indeed, if we suppose the apostles knew it to be so, by knowing him to be a *man*, they must have known him to be a *mere* man. But if a union of the divine and human natures be in itself impossible, that impossibility might as well appear to Dr. Priestley as to the apostles, if they were uninspired; and he might as well maintain the infallibility of his own notions, relative to the person of Christ, as of theirs.

In fine: Let Dr. Priestley view the subject in what light he may, if he deny the divine inspiration of the apostles, he will never be able to maintain their infallibility on any ground but what would equally infer his own.

When Mr. Burn charged Dr. Priestley with denying the infallibility of the apostolic testimony, he principally founds his charge on what the Doctor had written in a miscellaneous work called, *The Theological Repository*: in which he maintained, that "some texts of the Old Testament had been improperly quoted by writers in the New;" who, it seems, were sometimes "misled by Jewish prejudices."* Mr. Burn inferred, that if they were misled in their application of one text, they were *liable* to the same thing in others; and that, if so, we could have no

security whatever for their proper application of any passage, or of any thing like *infallibility* attending their testimony. One would think this is not the most inconclusive mode of reasoning that ever was adopted: and how does Dr. Priestley refute it? He replies, "It does not follow, because I suppose the apostles to have been fallible in *some* things, that they were therefore fallible in all." He contends that he always considered them as infallible, *in what respects the person of Christ*; as a proof of which, he alleges his always having "appealed to their testimony, as being willing to be decided by it." And yet, we generally suppose a single failure proves a writer fallible, as really as a thousand; and, as to his appealing to their testimony, and being willing to be decided by it, we generally appeal to the best evidence we can obtain, and must be decided by it. But this does not prove that we consider that evidence as *infallible*. Dr. Priestley has appealed to the *Fathers*: yet he will hardly pretend that their testimony is infallible; or, that they were incapable of contradicting either themselves, or one another, even in those matters concerning which the appeal is made. If he will, however, he must suppose them to have differed very widely from writers of a later date. Where is the historian who has written upon the opinions or characters of a body of men, even of those of his own times, but who is liable and likely, in some particulars, to be contradicted by other historians of the same period, and equally respectable?*

To be sure, if Dr. Priestley thinks proper to declare, that he believes the apostles, uninspired as they

* See this truth more fully illustrated in a Letter of Dr. Edward Williams to Dr. Priestley, prefixed to his *Abridgment of Dr. Owen on the Hebrews*.

were, to have been infallible when they applied passages of the Old Testament *to the person of Christ*; and that, notwithstanding their being fallible, and misled by Jewish prejudices in their application of passages on other subjects, nobody has a right to say he does not. Thus much may be said, however, that he will find it no very easy task to prove himself in this matter a *rational christian*. If the apostles are to be considered as uninspired, and were actually misled by Jewish prejudices in their application of some Old Testament passages, it will require no small degree of labour to convince people in general that we can have any security for their not being so in others.

Mr. Burn, with a view to illustrate his argument, supposed an example; viz. the application of Ps. xlv. 6. to Christ, in Heb. i. 8. He observes, that according to the foregoing hypothesis, “there is no dependance to be placed upon the argument; because the apostle, in his application of this scripture to the Messiah, *was misled by a prejudice common among the Jews, respecting this, and other passages in the Old Testament.*” Mr. Burn does not mean to say, that Dr. Priestley *had in this manner actually rejected the argument from Heb. i. 8*: but barely that, according to his hypothesis, *he might do so*: He preserves the *principle* of his opponent’s objection, as he himself expresses it; but does not mean to assert that he had applied that principle to this particular passage. And how does Dr. Priestley reply to this? Why, by alleging that he *had not* applied the above principle to the passage in question; but had given it a sense which allowed the propriety of its being applied to Christ. That is, he had not made that use of a principle which might be made of it, and which no one asserted he had made of it.

Dr. Priestley is, doubtless, possessed of great abilities, and has had large experience in controversial writing: to what a situation, then, must he have been reduced, to have recourse to such an answer as the above !

The question between Mr. Burn and Dr. Priestley, if I understand it, is not, Whether the latter appealed to the scriptures for the truth of his opinions ; but, Whether his supposing the sacred writers in some cases to apply scripture improperly, does not render that appeal inconsistent ? Not whether he had allowed the propriety of the apostle's quoting the sixth verse of the forty-fifth Psalm, and applying it in the first chapter of the Hebrews to Christ : but, Whether upon the principle of the sacred writers being liable to make, and having actually made, some improper quotations, he *might not* have disallowed it ? Not, whether the apostles did actually fail in this or that particular subject ; but, Whether, if they failed in some instances, they were not *liable* to fail in others ; and, whether any dependance could be placed on their decisions ? Not, whether the apostles testified *things which they had seen and heard from the beginning* ; but, Whether their *infallibility* can be supported merely upon that ground, without supposing that the holy Spirit assisted their memories, guided their judgments, and superintended their productions ? If the reader of that controversy keep the above points in view, he will easily perceive the futility of a great many of Dr. Priestley's answers, notwithstanding all his positivity and triumph, and his proceeding to admonish Mr. Burn to repentance.

Dr. Priestley, in his *Sixth Letter* to Mr. Burn, denies that he makes *the reason of the individual the sole umpire in matters of faith*. But if the sa-

cred writers “in some things which they advanced, were fallible, and misled by prejudice;” what dependence can be placed upon them? Whether the reason of the individual be a proper umpire in matters of faith, or not; the writings of the apostles, on the foregoing hypothesis, can make no such pretence. Dr. Priestley may allege, that we must distinguish between those things to which the apostles had not given much attention, and other things to which they had; those in which they were prejudiced, and others in which they were unprejudiced; those concerning which they had not the means of exact information, and others of a different description: but can he himself, at this distance of time, or even if he had been contemporary with them, always tell what those cases are? How, in many instances at least, can he judge with any certainty of the degree of attention which they gave to things; of the prejudiced, or unprejudiced state of their minds; or, of the means of information which they possessed? Or, if *he* could decide with satisfaction to himself on these matters, How are the bulk of mankind to judge, who are not possessed of his powers and opportunities, but who are equally interested in the affair with himself? Are they implicitly to rely on his opinion; or, to supplicate Heaven for a new revelation to point out the defects and errors of the old one? In short, let Dr. Priestley profess what regard he may for the scriptures, if what he advances be true, *they* can be no proper test of truth; and if the reason of the individual be not the sole umpire in these matters, there can be no umpire at all; but all must be left in gloomy doubt, and dreadful uncertainty.*

* The reader will observe, that the foregoing remarks on the controversy between Mr. Burn and Dr. Priestley, have

The generality of Socinian writers, as well as Dr. Priestley, write degradingly of our only rule of faith. The scriptures profess to be *profitable for DOCTRINE*; and to be able to make men wise unto salvation. *The testimony of the Lord* is said to be *sure, making wise the simple*; and those who made it their study, professed to have obtained *more understanding than all their teachers*. But Mr. LINDSEY considers the scriptures as unadapted to promote any high perfection in knowledge; and supposes that they are left in obscurity, with design to promote an occasion of charity, candour, and forbearance. Speaking of the doctrine of the person of Christ, "Surely it must be owned (he says) to have been left in some obscurity in the scriptures themselves, which might mislead readers, full of heathen prejudices, (otherwise so many men, wise and good, would not have differed, and still continue to differ, concerning it) and so left, it should seem, on purpose to whet human industry, and the spirit of inquiry into the things of God, to give scope for the exercise of men's charity and mutual forbearance of one another, and to be one great means of cultivating the moral dispositions; which is plainly the design of the holy Spirit of God in the christian revelation, and not any high perfection in knowledge which so few can attain."*

On this extraordinary passage, one might inquire, First, If the scriptures have left the subject in obscurity, why might not the mistake of those who hold the divinity of Christ (supposing them to be mistaken) have been accounted for, without alleging, as Mr. Lindsey elsewhere does, that, "they are de-
nothing to do with that part of it which relates to the Riots at Birmingham, but merely with that on *the person of Christ*.

terminated, at all events, to believe Christ to be a different Being from what he really was—that there is no reasoning with them—and that they are to be pitied, and considered as being under a debility of mind, in this respect, however sensible and rational in others ?”* If wise and good men have differed upon the subject in all ages, and that owing to the obscurity with which it is enveloped in the scriptures themselves, why this abusive and insulting language ? Is it any disgrace to a person not to see that clearly in the scriptures, which is not clearly there to be seen ?

Secondly : If the scriptures have indeed left the subject in obscurity, how came Mr. Lindsey to be so decided upon it ? The “ high perfection of knowledge” which he possesses, must undoubtedly have been acquired from some *other quarter* ; seeing it made no part of the design of the holy Spirit, in the christian revelation. But, if so, we have no further dispute with him ; as, in what respects religion, we do not aspire to be *wise above what is written*.

Thirdly : Let it be considered, whether the principle on which Mr. Lindsey encourages the exercise of charity and mutual forbearance, do not cast a heavy reflection upon the character of God. The scriptures, in what relates to the person of Christ, (a subject on which Dr. Priestley allows the writers to have been *infallible*) are left obscure ; so obscure, as to mislead readers full of heathen prejudices ; nay, and with the very design of misleading them. God himself, it seems, designed that they should stumble on in ignorance, error, and disagreement ; till at last, wearied with their fate, and finding themselves united in one common calamity, they might become friends. But what is this friendship ? Is it not at

the expense of him who is supposed to have spread their way with snares ; or, which is the same thing, with misleading obscurity ? Is it any other than the *friendship of the world, which is enmity with God ?*

In perfect harmony with Mr. Lindsey, is the language of a writer in the *Monthly Review*. “ The nature and design of the scripture (he says) is not to settle disputed theories, nor to decide upon speculative controverted questions, even *in religion and morality*—The scriptures, if we understand any thing of them, are intended not so much to make us wiser, as to make us better ; not to solve the doubts, but rather to make us obey the dictates of our consciences.”* The holy scriptures were never designed, then, to be a *rule* of faith or practice ; but merely a *stimulative*. In matters of speculation, (as all disputed subjects will be termed, whether doctrinal or practical) they have no authority, it seems, to decide any question. *What saith the scriptures ?* therefore, would now be an impertinent question. You are to find out what is truth, and what is righteousness, by your reason, and your conscience : and when you have obtained a system of religion and morality to your mind, scripture is to furnish you with motives to reduce it to practice. If this be true, to what purpose are all appeals to the scriptures on controverted subjects ; and why do Socinians pretend to appeal to them ? Why do they not honestly acknowledge, that they did not learn their religion from thence, and therefore refuse to have it tried at that bar ? This would save much labour. To what purpose do they object to particular passages as *interpolations* or *mistranslations*, or the like, when the whole, be it ever so pure, has nothing at all to do in the decision of our

* Rev. of Bishop Horsley's Sermon, Mar. 1793. vl. x. p. 357.

controversies ? We have been used to speak of conscience having but *one master, even Christ* : but now, it seems, conscience is its own master, and Jesus Christ does not pretend to dictate to it, but merely to assist in the execution of its decisions !

Mr. BELSHAM carries the matter still further. This gentleman, not satisfied, it seems, with disclaiming an implicit confidence in holy scripture, pretends to find *authority in the scriptures themselves for so doing*. “The Bereans (he says) are commended for not taking the word even of an apostle, but examining the scriptures for themselves, whether the doctrines which they heard were true, and whether St. Paul’s reasoning was just.”* I do not recollect, that the Bereans were commended *for not taking the word of an apostle* ; but for not rejecting it without examination, as the Jews did at Thessalonica. But, granting it were otherwise, their situation was different from ours. They had not then had an opportunity of obtaining evidence that the apostles were divinely inspired, or that the gospel which they preached was a message from God. This, surely, is a circumstance of importance. There is a great difference between their entertaining some doubt of the truth of the gospel, till they had fully examined its evidences ; and our still continuing to doubt of its particular doctrines and reasonings, even though we allow it to be a message from God.—To this may be added, that, in order to obtain evidence, the Bereans *sought the scriptures*. By comparing the facts which Paul testified, with the prophecies which went before ; and the doctrines which he preached, with

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* Serm. on Importance of Truth, p. 59.

those of the Old Testament ; they would judge whether his message was from God or not. There is a great difference between the criterion of the Be-reans, and that of the Socinians. The scriptures of the Old Testament were the allowed standard of the former ; and they employed their reason to find out their meaning, and their agreement with New Testament facts : but the authority and agreement of the Old and New Testaments will not satisfy the latter ; unless what they contain agree also with their pre-conceived notions of what is fit and reasonable. The one tried, what, for ought they at that time knew, were mere private reasonings, by the scriptures ; but the other try the scriptures by their own private reasonings.—Finally : If proposing a doctrine for examination, prove the proposer liable to false or unjust reasoning, it will follow, that the reasoning of Christ might be false or unjust, seeing he appealed to the scriptures, as well as his apostles, and commanded his hearers to *search* them. It will also follow, that all the great *facts* of christianity, as well as the reasonings of Christ and his apostles, were liable to be detected of falsehood ; for these were as constantly submitted to examination as the other. *These things*, said they, *were not done in a corner*. Nay, it must follow, that God himself is liable to be in a wrong cause, seeing he frequently appeals to men's judgment and consciences. *And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard*. The inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, were exhorted and even entreated, it may be said, not to take matters upon trust ; but to examine for themselves, whether the conduct of Jehovah was just, or whether any thing ought to have been done for his vineyard, that was not done !

But, far as our English Socinians have gone in these things, they do not seem to have exceeded, nor hardly to have equalled, those of the same denomination in other countries. These appear to have made great advances, indeed, towards infidelity. Mr. *Blackwall* makes mention of two, whose language conveys an idea of uncommon disrespect to the sacred writings. **GEORGE ENGEDIN**, speaking of the writings of John, says, "If a concise, abrupt obscurity, inconsistent with itself, and made up of allegories, is to be called sublimity of speech, I own *John* to be sublime : for there is scarce one discourse of Christ which is not altogether allegorical, and very hard to be understood." **GAGNEIUS**, another writer of the same spirit, says, "I shall not a little glory, if I shall be found to give some light to *Paul's* darkness ; a darkness, as some think, industriously affected."—"Let any of the followers of these worthy interpreters of the gospel, and champions of christianity, (adds Mr. *Blackwall*, by way of reflection) speak worse if they can, of the ambiguous oracles of the father of lies. These fair-dealing gentlemen first disguise the sacred writers, and turn them into a harsh allegory ;—and then charge them with that obscurity and inconsistency which is plainly consequent upon that sense, which their interpretations force upon them. They outrage the divine writers in a double capacity : first, they debase their sense as theologues and commentators, and then carp at, and vilify their language as grammarians and critics."*

STEINBART, **SEMLER**, and other foreign Socinians, of later times, write in a similar strain. The *former*, speaking of the narrations of facts contained in the New Testament, says, "These narrations,

* Sacred Classics, Pt. II. Ch. V.

true or false, are only suited for ignorant, uncultivated minds, who cannot enter into the evidence of natural religion." The same writer adds, "Moses, according to the childish conceptions of the Jews in his days, paints God as agitated by violent affections, partial to one people, and hating all other nations."—The *latter*, in a Note on 2 Pet. i. 2, *The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*, says, "Peter speaks there according to the conception of the Jews;" and, that "the prophets may have delivered the offspring of their own brains as divine revelations."*

Socinian writers sometimes profess great respect to the holy scriptures; and most, if not all of them, would have it thought that they consider their testimony as being in their favour. But, if so, why all these pains to depreciate them? We know who they are that not only undermine their general credit, but are obliged on almost every occasion to have recourse to *interpolation*, or *mistranslation*; who are driven to disown the apostolic *reasonings* as a proper test of religious sentiment, and to hold them as the mere private opinions of men, no way decisive as to what is truth. But is it usual in any cause for persons to endeavour to set aside those witnesses, and to invalidate that testimony, which they consider, at the same time, as being in their favour? This is a question which it does not require much critical skill to decide.

When Socinian writers have mangled and altered the translation to their own minds, informing us, that such a term *may* be rendered so, and such a

* Dr. Erskine's Sketches and Hints of Church History, No. III, p. 95, 71.

passage should be pointed so—and so on—they seem to expect that their opponents should quote the scriptures accordingly ; and, if they do not, are very liberal in insinuating that their design is to impose upon the vulgar. But though it be admitted, that every translation must needs have its imperfections, and that those imperfections ought to be corrected by fair and impartial criticism : yet, where alterations are made by those who have an end to answer by them, they ought always to be suspected, and will be so by thinking and impartial people.

If we must quote particular passages of scripture, after the manner in which our adversaries translate them, we must also avoid quoting all those which they object to as interpolations. Nor shall we stop here : we must, on certain occasions, leave out whole chapters, if not whole books. We must never refer to the *reasonings* of the apostles, but consider that they were subject to be misled by Jewish prejudices ; nor even to *historical facts*, unless we can satisfy ourselves that the historians, independent of their being divinely inspired, were possessed of sufficient means of information. In short, if we must never quote scripture, except according to the rules imposed upon us by Socinian writers, we must not quote it at all : not, at least, till they shall have indulged us with a Bible of their own, that shall leave out every thing on which we are to place no dependance. A publication of this sort would doubtless be an acceptable present to the christian world ; would be comprised in a *very small compass* ; and be of infinite service in cutting short a great deal of unnecessary controversy, into which, for want of such a criterion, we shall always be in danger of wandering.

Dr. Priestley, in his *Animadversions on Mr. Gibbon's History*, takes notice of what is *implied* in that gentleman's endeavouring to lessen the number and validity of the early martyrdoms; namely, a consciousness that they afforded an argument against him. "Mr. Gibbon (says the Doctor,) appears to have been sufficiently sensible of the value of such a testimony to the truth of the gospel history, as is furnished by the early martyrdoms, and, therefore, he takes great pains to diminish their number; and, when the facts cannot be denied, he endeavours to exhibit them in the most unfavourable light."* Judge, brethren, whether this picture does not bear too near a resemblance to the conduct of Dr. Priestley, and other Socinian writers, respecting the holy scriptures.

I have heard of persons, who, when engaging in a law-suit, and fearing lest certain individuals should appear in evidence against them, have so contrived matters as to *sue the witnesses*; and so, by making them parties in the contest, have disqualified them for bearing testimony. And what else is the conduct of Dr. Priestley, with respect to those passages in the New Testament which speak of Christ as GOD? We read there, that *The Word, who was made flesh, and dwelt among us, WAS GOD*. Thomas exclaimed, *My Lord, and my GOD—Of whom as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, GOD blessed forever. Unto the Son he saith, thy throne, O GOD, is forever and ever—Feed the Church of GOD which he hath purchased with his own blood—Hereby perceive we the love of GOD, because he laid down his life for us.*† But Dr. Priestley asserts, that "in no sense whatever, not even in the lowest of all, is Christ so much

* Letters to a Phil. Unb. Pt. II. p. 217. † John i. 1, 14.
xx. 28. Rom. ix. 5. Heb. i. 8. Acts. xx. 28. 1 John iii. 16.

as called *God* in all the New Testament.”* The method taken by this writer to enable him to hazard such an assertion, without being subject to the charge of downright falsehood, could be no other than that of laying a kind of *arrest* upon the foregoing passages, with others, as being either interpolations, or mistranslations, or something that shall answer the same end; and by these means imposing silence upon them, as to the subject in dispute. To be sure, we may go on, killing one scripture testimony, and stoning another, till at length it will become an easy thing to assert, that there is not an instance in all the New Testament, in which our opinions are confronted. But to what does it all amount? When we are told, that “Christ is never so much as called *God* in all the New Testament;” the question is, Whether we are to understand it of the New Testament as it was left by the sacred writers; or, as corrected, amended, curtailed, and interpreted, by a set of controvertists, with a view to make it accord with a favourite system?

I am, &c.

LETTER XIII.

ON THE TENDENCY OF THE DIFFERENT SYSTEMS, TO
PROMOTE HAPPINESS OR CHEERFULNESS OF MIND.

Christian Brethren,

NOTHING is more common with our opponents, than to represent the Calvinistic system as gloomy; as leading to melancholy and misery. Our ideas of God, of sin, and of future punishment, they say, must necessarily depress our minds. Dr. Priestley, as we

* Letter I. to Mr. Burn.

have seen already, reckons Unitarians "more cheerful" than Trinitarians. Nor is this all. It has even been asserted, that the tendency of our principles is to promote "moral turpitude, melancholy, and despair; and that the suicide practised among the middling, and lower ranks, is frequently to be traced to this doctrine."* This is certainly carrying matters to a great height. It might be worth while, however, for those who advance such things as these, to make good what they affirm, if they be able. Till that be done, candour itself must consider these bold assertions as the mere effusions of malignity and slander.

It is some consolation, however, that what is objected to us by Socinians, is objected to *religion itself* by unbelievers. Lord *Shaftesbury* observes, "There is a melancholy which accompanies all enthusiasm;" which, from his pen, is only another name for christianity. To the same purpose, Mr. *Hume* asserts, "There is a gloom and melancholy remarkable in all devout people." If these writers had formed a comparison between deists and atheists on the one side, and devout christians on the other, they would have said of the former, as Dr. Priestley says of Unitarians, "They are more cheerful, and more happy."

It is granted, that the system we adopt, has nothing in it adapted to promote the happiness of those who persist in enmity against God, and in a rejection of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the only way of salvation. While men are at war with God, we do not know of any evangelical promise that is calculated to make them happy. This, perhaps, with some may be a considerable ground of objection to our views of things; but then, such objection must

* See Crit. Rev. for Sept. 1787, on *Memoirs of Gabriel D'Anville*.

equally stand against the scriptures themselves; since their language to ungodly men is, *Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep*. All the prophets, and ministers of the word were, in effect, commanded to *say to the wicked, IT SHALL BE ILL WITH HIM*. This, with us, is one considerable objection against the doctrine of *the final salvation of all men*; a doctrine much circulated of late, and generally embraced by Socinian writers. Supposing it were a truth, it must be of such a kind as is adapted to comfort mankind *in sin*. It is good news: but it is to the impenitent and unbelieving, even those who live and die such; which is a characteristic so singular, that I question whether any thing can be found in the Bible to resemble it. If our views of things be but adapted to encourage sinners to return to God by Jesus Christ; if they afford strong consolation to those who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them; and if sobriety, righteousness, and godliness, here meet with the most powerful motives; this is all that the scriptures themselves propose.

Our system, it is granted, is not adapted to promote that kind of cheerfulness and happiness to which men in general are greatly addicted; namely, that which consists in *self-deceit*, and *levity of spirit*. There is a kind of cheerfulness like that of a tradesman, who avoids looking into his accounts lest they should disturb his peace, and render him unhappy. This, indeed, is the cheerfulness of a great part of mankind; who shun the light, lest it should disturb their repose, and interrupt their present pursuits. They try to persuade themselves that *they* shall have peace, though they add drunkenness to thirst; and there are not wanting preachers who afford them assistance in the dangerous delusion. The doctrines of human

depravity, of sinners being under the curse of the law, and of their exposedness to everlasting punishment, are those which are supposed to lead us to melancholy ; and we may fairly conclude that the *opposites* to these doctrines are at the bottom of the cheerfulness of which our opponents boast. Instead of considering mankind as lost sinners, exposed to everlasting destruction ; they love to represent them simply as creatures, as the children of God, and to suppose that, having in general more virtue than vice, they have nothing to fear ; or if, in a few instances, it be otherwise, still they have no reason to be afraid of *endless* punishment. These things, to be sure, make people cheerful ; but it is with the cheerfulness of a wicked man. It is just as wicked men would have it. It is no wonder that persons of “no religion, and who lean to a life of dissipation, should be the first to embrace these principles.” They are such as must needs suit them : especially if we add, what Dr. Priestley inculcates in his Sermon on the death of Mr. Robinson, *That it is not necessary to dwell in our thoughts upon death and futurity, lest it should interrupt the business of life, and cause us to live in perpetual bondage.** We hope it is no disparagement of the Calvinistic doctrine, that it disclaims the promoting of all such cheerfulness as this. That cheerfulness which is damped by thoughts of death and futurity, is, at best, mere natural joy. It has no virtue in it : nay, in many cases, it is positively vicious, and founded in self-deception. It is nothing better than *the laughter of a fool*. It may blaze awhile, in the bosoms of the dissipated and the secure ; but, if the sinner be once awakened to just

* This is the substance of what he advances, from p. 7 to 12.

reflection, it will expire *like the crackling of thorns under a pot*.

There is also a kind of happiness which some persons enjoy, in treating the most serious and important subjects with *levity*; making them the subjects of jest, and trying their skill in disputing upon them; which is frequently called pleasantry, good-nature, and the like. A cheerfulness of this kind, in *Oliver Cromwell*, is praised by Mr. Lindsey, and represented as an excellency “of which the gloomy bigot is utterly incapable.”* Pleasantry, on some occasions, and to a certain degree, is natural, and allowable: but if sporting with sacred things must go by that name, let me be called “a gloomy bigot,” rather than indulge it.

Once more: It is allowed, that the system we embrace has a tendency on various occasions to promote *sorrow of heart*. Our notions of the evil of sin exceed those of our opponents. While they reject the doctrine of atonement by the cross of Christ, they have not that glass in which to discern its malignity, which others have. There are times in which we remember Calvary, and weep on account of that for which our Redeemer died. But so far are we from considering this as our infelicity, that, for weeping in this manner once, we could wish to do so a thousand times. There is a pleasure in the very pains of godly sorrow, of which the light-minded speculatist is utterly incapable. The tears of her that wept, and washed her Saviour’s feet, afforded abundantly greater satisfaction than the unfeeling calm of the pharisee, who stood by making his ill-natured reflections upon her conduct.

* Apol. Chap. ii.

If our views of things have no tendency to promote solid, holy, heavenly joy ; joy that fits true christians for the proper business of this world, and the blessedness of that which is to come ; we will acknowledge it a strong presumption against them. If, on the other hand, they can be proved to possess such a tendency, and that in a much greater degree than the opposite scheme, it will be a considerable argument in their favour. Let us examine this matter a little closer.

The utmost happiness which the peculiar principles of Socinians are adapted to promote, consists in *calmness of mind*, like that of a philosopher contemplating the works of creation. The friends of that scheme conceive of man as a good kind of Being, and suppose there is a greater proportion of virtue in the world than vice, and that things upon the whole are getting better still, and so tending to happiness. They suppose there is little or no breach between God and men ; nothing but what may be made up by repentance, a repentance without much pain of mind,* and without any atoning Saviour ; that God, being the benevolent Father of his rational offspring, will not be strict to mark iniquity : and that, as his benevolence is infinite, all will be well at last : *As with the good, so with the sinner : with him that sweareth, as with him that feareth an oath.* This makes them serene ; and enables them to pursue the studies of philosophy, or the avocations of life, with composure. This appears to be the summit of their happiness ; and must be so of all others, if they wish to escape their censure. For if any one pretends to happiness of a superior kind, they will instantly reproach him as an enthusiast. A writer in the *Monthly Review*, observes, concerning the late *President Edwards* ;

* Such a repentance is pleaded for by Mr. Jardine in his Letters to Mr. Bogue.

“From the account given of him, he appears to have been a very reputable, good, and pious man, according to his *views and feelings* in religious matters; which those of different sentiments, and cooler sensations, will not fail to consider as all wild *ecstasy, rapture, and enthusiasm.*”*

The tendency of any system to promote *calmness*, is nothing at all in its favour, any further than such calmness can be proved to be virtuous. But this must be determined by the situation in which we stand. We ought to be affected according to our situation. If, indeed, there be no breach between God and men; if all be right on our part, as well as his, and just as it should be; then it becomes us to be calm and thankful: but if it be otherwise, it becomes us to feel accordingly. If we have offended God, we ought to bewail our transgressions, and be sorry for our sin; and if the offence be great, we ought to be deeply affected with it. It would be thought very improper for a convict, a little before the time appointed for his execution, instead of cherishing proper reflections on the magnitude of his offence, and suing for the mercy of his offended Sovereign, to be employed in speculating upon his benevolence, till he has really worked himself into a persuasion, that no serious apprehensions were to be entertained, either concerning himself, or any of his fellow convicts. Such a person might enjoy a much greater degree of *calmness* than his companions: but considerate people would neither admire his mode of thinking, nor envy his imaginary felicity.

Calmness and serenity of mind *may* arise from ignorance of ourselves, and from the want of a principle of true religion. While Paul was ignorant of his true

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* Rev. of Edwards' Hist. of Redemption, Vol. LXXX. Art. 68.

character, he was calm and easy; or as he expresses it, *alive without the law*; but *when the commandment came*, in its spirituality and authority, *sin revived, and he died*. The Pharisee who was *whole* in his own esteem, and needed no physician, was abundantly more calm than the Publican, who smote upon his breast, and cried, *God be merciful to me a sinner!* While any man is destitute of a principle of true religion, the strong man armed keepeth the house, and the goods are in *peace*; and while things are thus, he will be a stranger to all those holy mournings which abound in the Psalms of David, and to those inward conflicts between *flesh and spirit* described in the writings of Paul. And, knowing nothing of such things himself, he will be apt to think meanly of those who do; to deride them as enthusiasts, to reproach them with gloominess, and to boast of his own insensibility, under the names of calmness and cheerfulness.

Supposing the calmness and cheerfulness of mind of which our opponents boast, to be on the side of virtue; still it is a cold and insipid kind of happiness, compared with that which is produced by the doctrine of salvation through the atoning blood of Christ. One great source of happiness is *contrast*. Dr. Priestley has proved, what indeed is evident from universal experience, "That the recollection of past troubles, after a certain interval, becomes highly pleasurable, and is a pleasure of a very durable kind."* On this principle he undertakes to prove the infinite benevolence of the Deity, even in his so ordering things, that a mixture of pain and sorrow shall fall to the lot of man. On the same principle may be proved, if I mistake not, the superiority of the Calvinistic system to that of the Socinians, in point of promoting happiness. The doc-

* Let. to a Phil. Unb. Pt. 1. Let. vi.

trines of the former, supposing them to be true, are *affecting*. It is affecting to think, that man, originally pure, should have fallen from the height of righteousness and honour, to the depth of apostasy and infamy—that he is now an enemy to God, and actually lies under his awful and just displeasure, exposed to everlasting misery—that, notwithstanding all this, a ransom is found to deliver him from going down to the pit—that God so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son to become a sacrifice for sin, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life—that the issue of Christ's death is not left at an uncertainty, nor the invitations of his gospel subject to universal rejection, but an effectual provision is made in the great plan of redemption, that he shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied—that the Holy Spirit is given to renew and sanctify a people for himself—that they who were under condemnation and wrath, being justified by faith in the righteousness of Jesus, have peace with God—that aliens and outcasts are become the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty—that everlasting arms are now beneath them, and everlasting glory is before them.—These sentiments, I say, supposing them to be true, are undoubtedly *affecting*. The Socinian system, supposing it were true, compared with this, is cold, uninteresting, and insipid.

We read of *joy and peace in believing*—of *joy unspeakable, and full of glory*. Those who adopt the Calvinistic doctrine of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and of their own lost condition as sinners, are prepared to imbibe the joy of the gospel, supposing it to exhibit a great salvation, through the atonement of a great Saviour, to which others, of opposite sentiments, must of necessity be strangers. The Pharisees, who thought

well of their character and condition, like the elder son in the parable, instead of rejoicing at the good news of salvation to the chief of sinners, were disgusted at it : and this will ever be the case with all who, like the Pharisees, are *whole* in their own eyes, so whole as to think they need no physician.

The votaries of the Socinian scheme do not, in general, appear to feel their hearts much interested by it. *Voltaire* could say in his time, “ At least hitherto, only a very small number of those called Unitarians have held any religious meetings.”* And though Dr. Priestley, by his great zeal, has endeavoured to invigorate and reform the party : yet he admits the justice of a common complaint among them, that “ their societies do not flourish, their members have but a slight attachment to them, and easily desert them, though it is never imagined (he adds) that they desert their principles.”† All this the Doctor accounts for by allowing, that their principles are not of that importance which we suppose ours to be ; and that “ many of those who judge so truly concerning the particular tenets of religion, have attained to that cool, unbiassed temper of mind, in consequence of becoming more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it.” Through *indifference*, it seems, they come in ; through *indifference* they go out ; and are very *indifferent* while there. Yet, it is said, they still retain their principles ; and, I suppose, are very cheerful, and very happy. Happiness, theirs, consequently, which does not interest the heart, any more than reform the life.

Although the aforementioned writer in the Monthly Review insinuates, that President Edwards’s religious feelings were “ all wild ecstasy, rapture and enthusi-

* Additions to Gen. Hist. Art. England, under Charles II.

† Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 94.

asm ;” yet he adds, “ We cannot question the sincerity of Mr. Edwards, who, however he may possibly have imposed on himself by the warmth of his imagination, was, perhaps, rather to be envied, than derided for his ardours and ecstasies, which, in themselves, were at least innocent ; in which he, no doubt, found much delight, and from which no creature could receive the least hurt.” I thank you, sir, for this concession. It will, at least, serve to shew, that the sentiments and feelings which you deem wild and enthusiastical, may, by your own acknowledgment, be the most adapted to promote human happiness ; and that is all for which I at present contend. President Edwards, however, was far from being a person of that warm imagination, which this writer would insinuate. No man could be a greater enemy to real enthusiasm. Under the most virulent oppositions, and the heaviest trials, he possessed a great share of coolness of judgment, as well as of calmness and serenity of mind ; as great, and perhaps greater, than any one whom this gentleman can refer us to, among those whom he calls men of *cool sensations*. But he felt deeply in religion ; and in such feelings, our adversaries themselves being judges, he was to be “ envied, and not derided.”

Why should religion be the only subject in which we must not be allowed to *feel* ? Men are praised for the exercise of ardour, and even of ecstasy, in poetry, in politics, and in the endearing connections of social life ; but, in religion, we must either go on with cool indifference, or be branded as enthusiasts. Is it because religion is of less importance than other things ? Is eternal salvation of less consequence than the political or domestic accommodations of time ? It is treated by multitudes as if it were ; and the spirit of Socinianism, so far as it operates, tends to keep them in countenance.

Is it not a pity but those who call themselves *rational christians*, would act more rationally? Nothing can be more irrational, as well as injurious, than to encourage an ardour of mind after the trifles of a moment, and to discourage it when pursuing objects of infinite magnitude.

“Passion is reason, transport temper here!”

The Socinian system proposes to exclude *mystery* from religion, or, “things in their own nature incomprehensible.”* But such a scheme not only renders religion the only thing in nature void of mystery, but divests it of a property essential to the continued communication of happiness to an immortal creature. Our passions are more affected by objects which surpass our comprehension, than by those which we fully know. It is thus with respect to *unhappiness*. An unknown misery is much more dreadful than one that is fully known. Suspense adds to distress. If, with regard to transient sufferings, we know the worst, the worst is commonly over: and hence our troubles are frequently greater when feared, than when actually felt. It is the same with respect to *happiness*. That happiness which is felt in the pursuit of science, abates in the full possession of the object. When once a matter is fully known, we cease to take that pleasure in it as at first, and long for something new. It is the same in all other kinds of happiness. The mind loves to swim in deep waters: if it touch the bottom it feels disgust. If the best were once fully known, the best would thence be over. Some of the noblest passions in Paul were excited by objects incomprehensible: *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his*

* Def. of Unit. for 1786, p. 67.

ways past finding out !—Great is the mystery of godliness : God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, believed on in the world, received up into glory ! Now, if things be so, it is easy to see, that, to divest religion of every thing incomprehensible, is to divest it of what is essential to human happiness. And no wonder : for it is nothing less than to divest it of **GOD !**

The Socinian scheme, by rejecting the Deity and atonement of Christ, rejects the very essence of that which both supports and transports a christian's heart. It was acknowledged by Mr. Hume, that, "*The good, the great, the sublime, and the ravishing* were to be found evidently in the principles of theism." To this Dr. Priestley very justly replies : "*If so, I need not say that there must be something mean, abject, and debasing in the principles of atheism.*"* But let it be considered, whether this observation be not equally applicable to the subject in hand. Our opponents, it is true, may hold sentiments which are great and transporting. Such are their views of the works of God in creation : but so are those of deists. Neither are these the sentiments in which they differ from us. Is the Socinian system, *as distinguished from ours*, adapted to raise and transport the heart ? This is the question. Let us select only one topic for an example. Has any thing, or can any thing be written, on the scheme of our adversaries, upon *the death of Christ* equal to the following lines ?

" Religion ! thou the soul of happiness ;
And groaning *Calvary* of thee ! *there* shine
The noblest truths ; *there* strongest motives sting !
There sacred violence assaults the soul.—
My theme ! my inspiration ! and my crown !

* Letters to a Phil. Unb. Pt. I. pref. p. x.

My strength in age ! my rise in low estate !
 My soul's ambition, pleasure, wealth !—my world !
 My light in darkness ! and my life in death !
 My boast through time ! bliss through eternity !
 Eternity too short to speak thy praise !
 Or fathom thy profound of love to man !
 To man, of men the meanest, ev'n to me ;
 My sacrifice ! my God ! what things are these !"

Again :

" Pardon for infinite offence ! and pardon,
 Through means that speak its value infinite !
 A pardon bought with blood ! with blood divine !
 With blood divine of him I made my foe !
 Persisted to provoke ! though woo'd, and aw'd,
 Bless'd, and chastis'd, a flagrant rebel still !
 A rebel 'midst the thunders of his throne !
 Nor I alone, a rebel universe !
 My species up in arms ! not one exempt !
 Yet for the foulest of the foul he dies !——
 Bound every heart ! and every bosom burn !
 Oh what a scale of miracles is here !——
 Praise ! flow forever (if astonishment
 Will give thee leave) my praise ! forever flow ;
 Praise ardent, cordial, constant, to high Heaven
 More fragrant than Arabia sacrific'd ;
 And all her spicy mountains in a flame !"

Night Thoughts, No. iv.

There is a rich, great, and ravishing quality in the foregoing sentiments, which no other theme can inspire. Had the writer been a Socinian, and attempted to write upon the death of Christ, he might, by the strength of his mind and the fire of his genius, have contributed a little to raise his subject ; but here his subject raises him above himself.

The dignity of Christ, together with his glorious undertaking, was, as we have seen in Letter XI, a

source of joy and love to the primitive christians. It was their darling theme, and that which raised them above themselves. Now, according to our system, christians may still rejoice in the same manner; and give vent to their souls, and to all that is within them, and that without fear of going beyond the words of truth and soberness; or of bordering, or seeming to border, upon idolatry. But upon the principles of our opponents, the sacred writers must have dealt largely in hyperbole; and it must be our business, instead of entering into their spirit, to sit down with "cool sensations," criticise their words, and explain away their apparent meaning.

Brethren! I appeal to your own hearts, as men who have been brought to consider yourselves as the scriptures represent you; Is there any thing in that preaching which leaves out the doctrine of salvation by an atoning sacrifice, that can afford you any relief? Is it not like the priest and Levite who passed by on the other side? Is not the doctrine of atonement by the blood of Christ, like the oil and wine of the good Samaritan? Under all the pressures of life, whether from inward conflicts, or outward troubles, is not this your grand support? What but *an advocate with the Father, one who is the propitiation for our sins*, could prevent you, when you have sinned against God, from sinking into despondency, and encourage you to sue afresh for mercy? What else could so divest affliction of its bitterness; death of its sting; or the grave of its gloomy aspect? In fine, what else could enable you to contemplate a future judgment with composure? What hope could you entertain of being justified at that day upon any other footing than this, *It is Christ that died?*

I am aware I shall be told, that this is appealing to the passions, and to the passions of enthusiasts. To which it may be replied ; in a question which relates to happiness, the *heart* is the best criterion : and if it be enthusiasm to think and feel concerning ourselves as the scriptures represent us, and concerning Christ as he is there exhibited, let me live and die an enthusiast. So far from being ashamed to appeal to such characters, in my opinion they are the only competent judges. Men of mere speculation play with doctrines : it is the plain and serious christian that knows most of their real tendency. In a question, therefore, which concerns their happy or unhappy influence, his judgment is of the greatest importance.

Dr. Priestley allows, that “ the doctrine of a general, and a most particular providence, is so leading a feature in every scheme of predestination, it brings God so much into every thing,—that an habitual and animated devotion is the result.”* This witness is true : nor is this all. The same principle, taken in its connection with various others, equally provides for a serene and joyful satisfaction in all the events of time. All the vicissitudes of nations ; all the furious oppositions to the church of Christ ; all the efforts to overturn the doctrine of the cross, or blot out the spirit of christianity from the earth, we consider as permitted for wise and holy ends. And, being satisfied that they make a part of God’s eternal plan, we are not inordinately anxious about them. We can assure our opponents, that when we hear them boast of their increasing numbers, as also professed unbelievers of theirs, it gives us no other pain than that which arises from good will to men. We have no doubt that these things are wisely permitted ;

* Doctrine of Necessity, p. 162.

that they are a fan in the hand of Christ, by which he will thoroughly purge his floor ; and that the true gospel of Christ, like the sun in the heavens, will finally disperse all these interposing clouds. We are persuaded, as well as they, that things upon the whole, whether we in our contracted spheres of observation perceive it or not, are tending to the general good ; that the empire of truth and righteousness, notwithstanding all the infidelity and iniquity that are in the world, is upon the increase ; that it must increase more and more ; that glorious things are yet to be accomplished in the church of God ; and that all which we have hitherto seen, or heard, of the gospel dispensation, is but as the first fruits of an abundant harvest.

The tendency of a system to promote present happiness, may be estimated by the degree of *security* which accompanies it. The obedience and sufferings of Christ, according to the Calvinistic system, constitute the ground of our acceptance with God. *A good moral life*, on the other hand, is the only foundation on which our opponents profess to build their hopes.* Now, supposing our principles should prove erroneous, while they do not lead us to neglect good works, but to abound in them from love to God, and with a regard to his glory ; it may be presumed, that the divine Being will not cast us off to eternity for having ascribed too much to him, and too little to ourselves. But if the principles of our opponents should be found erroneous, and the foundation on which they build their hopes, should at last give way, the issue must be fatal ! I never knew a person in his dying moments alarmed for the consequences of

* See the quotations from Dr. Priestley, Dr. Harwood, and Mrs. Barbauld, Let. ix.

having assumed too little to himself, or for having ascribed too much to Christ; but many at that hour of serious reflection, have been more than a little apprehensive of danger from the contrary.

After all, it is allowed, that there is a considerable number of persons amongst us, who are under too great a degree of mental dejection; but though the number of such persons, taken in the aggregate, be considerable, yet there are not enough of them to render it any thing like a *general* case. And as to those who are so, they are almost all of them, such, either from constitution, from the want of a mature judgment to distinguish just causes of sorrow, or from a sinful neglect of their duties and their advantages. Those who enter most deeply into our views of things, provided their conduct be consistent, and there be no particular propensity to gloominess in their constitution, are among the happiest people in the world.

I am, &c.

LETTER XIV.

A COMPARISON OF MOTIVES EXHIBITED BY THE TWO SYSTEMS, TO GRATITUDE, OBEDIENCE, AND HEAVENLY-MINDEDNESS.

Christian Brethren,

THE subject of this letter has been occasionally noticed already; but there are a few things in reserve that require your attention. As men are allowed on both sides to be influenced by *motives*, which ever of the systems it is that excels in this particular, that of course must be the system which has the greatest tendency to promote a holy life.

One very important motive with which the scriptures acquaint us, is, **THE LOVE OF GOD MANIFESTED IN THE GIFT OF HIS SON.** *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life—Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins—God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us—He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all—Behold, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.** The benevolence of God to men is represented in the New Testament as consisting, not in his overlooking their frailties, nor so much even in his forgiving their sins, as in giving his only-begotten Son to die for them. *Herein was love,* and herein was found the grand motive to grateful obedience. There is no necessity, indeed, for establishing this point, since Dr. Priestley has fully acknowledged it. He allows that “the love of God in giving his Son to die for us, is the consideration on which the scriptures always lay the greatest stress as a motive to gratitude and obedience.”† As this is a matter of fact, then, allowed on both sides, it may be worth while to make some inquiry into the reason of it; or *why* it is that so great a stress should be laid in the scriptures upon this motive. To say nothing of the strong presumption which this acknowledgment affords in favour of the doctrine of atonement, suffice it at present to observe, that in all other cases, an obligation to gratitude is supposed to bear some proportion to the magnitude or *value* of the gift. But

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* John iii. 16. 1 John iv. 10, 11. Rom. v. 8. and viii. 32.

† Def. of Unit. for 1786. p. 102.

if it be allowed in this instance, it will follow, that the system which gives us the most exalted views of the dignity of Christ, must include the strongest motives to obedience and gratitude.

If there be any meaning in the words, the phraseology of John iii. 16, *God so loved the world, that he gave HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON*,—conveys an idea of the highest worth in the object bestowed. So great was this gift, that the love of God in the bestowment of it is considered as *inexpressible* and *inestimable*. We are not told *how much* he loved the world, but that he so loved it, that he gave HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON. If Jesus Christ be of more worth than the *world* for which he was given, then was the language of the sacred writer fit and proper; and then was the gift of him truly great, and worthy of being made “the consideration upon which the scriptures should lay the greatest stress, as a motive to gratitude and obedience.” But if he be *merely a man* like ourselves, and was given only to instruct us by his doctrine and example, there is nothing so *great* in the gift of him, nothing that will justify the language of the sacred writers from the appearance of bombast; nothing that should render it a motive to gratitude and obedience upon which the *greatest stress* should be laid.

Dr. Priestley, in his Letters to Dr. Price, observes, that “In passing from Trinitarianism to high Arianism, from this to your low Arianism, and from this to Socinianism, even of the lowest kind, in which Christ is considered as a mere man, the son of Joseph and Mary, and naturally as fallible and peccable as Moses or any prophet, there are sufficient sources of gratitude and devotion. I myself, (continues Dr. Priestley) have gone through all those changes, and I think I may assure you that you have nothing to

apprehend from any part of the progress. In every stage of it you have that consideration on which the scriptures always lay the greatest stress, as a motive to gratitude and obedience, viz. the love of God, the Almighty Parent, in giving his Son to die for us. And whether this Son be man, angel, or of a super-angelic nature, every thing that he has done is to be referred to the *love of God*, the original author of all, and to him all our gratitude and obedience is ultimately due.”*

Dr. *Priestley*, it seems, wishes to have it thought, that, seeing Trinitarians, Arians, and Socinians agree, in considering the gift of Christ as an expression of the love of God ; therefore, their different systems are upon a level, as to the grand motive to gratitude and obedience. As if it made no difference at all, whether that gift was small or great ; whether it was a man, or an angel, or one whom men and angels are bound to adore ; whether it was to die, as other martyrs did, to set us an example of perseverance ; or, by laying down his life as an atoning sacrifice, to deliver us from the wrath to come. He might as well suppose the gift of one talent to be equal to that of ten thousand, and that it would induce an equal return of gratitude ; or that the gift of Moses, or any other prophet, afforded an equal motive to love and obedience, as the gift of Christ.

If in every stage of religious principle, whether Trinitarian, Arian, or Socinian, by admitting that one general principle, *The love of God in giving his Son to die for us*, we have the same motive to gratitude and obedience, and that in the same degree ; it must be because the greatness or smallness of the gift is a matter of no consideration,

* Def. of Unit. for 1786, pp. 101, 102.

and has no tendency to render a motive stronger or weaker. But this is not only repugnant to the plainest dictates of reason, as hath been already observed ; but also to the doctrine of Christ. According to this, *He that hath much forgiven, loveth much ; and he that hath little forgiven, loveth little*. From hence it appears, that the system which affords the most extensive views of the evil of sin, the depth of human apostasy, and the magnitude of redemption, will induce us to love the most, or produce in us the greatest degree of gratitude and obedience.

It is to no purpose to say, as Dr. Priestley does, “ Every thing that Christ hath done is to be referred to *the love of God*.” For be it so, the question is, if his system be true, *What hath he done* ; and what is there to be referred to the love of God ? To say the most, it can be but little. If Dr. Priestley be right, the breach between God and man is not so great but that our repentance and obedience are of themselves, without any atonement whatever, sufficient to heal it. Christ, therefore, could have but *little to do*. But, the less he had to do, the less we are indebted to him, and to God for the gift of him : and in proportion as this is believed, we must of course feel less gratitude, and devotedness of soul to God.

Another important motive with which the scriptures acquaint us, is, THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN COMING INTO THE WORLD, AND LAYING DOWN HIS LIFE FOR US. *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus : who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God : but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men—For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his*

poverty might be made rich—*Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same ; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil—Verily, he took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham—The love of Christ constraineth us : because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead ; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again—Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering, and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour—To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* Such is the uniform language of the New Testament concerning the love of Christ ; and such are the moral purposes to which it is applied. It is a presumption in favour of our system, that here the above motives have all their force ; whereas, in the system of our opponents, they have scarcely any force at all. The following observations may render this sufficiently evident.

We consider the coming of Christ into the world as a *voluntary undertaking*. His *taking upon him*, or *taking hold*, not of the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham ; his *taking upon him* the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of men, and that from a state of *mind* which is held up for our example ; and his becoming *poor*, though *previously rich*, for our sakes, and that as an act of grace, all concur to establish this idea. For this we feel our hearts bound by every consideration that love unparalleled can inspire, to gratitude and obedience. But our opponents, by supposing Christ to have been a mere man, and to have had no existence till he was

born of Mary, are necessarily driven to deny that his coming into the world was a voluntary act of his own; and consequently, that there was any love or *grace* in it. Dr. Priestley, in answer to Dr. Price, contends only that he “came into the world in obedience to the command of the Father, and not in consequence of his own proposal.” But the idea of his coming in obedience to the command of the Father, is as inconsistent with the Socinian scheme, as his coming in consequence of his own proposal. For if he had no existence previous to his being born of Mary, he could do neither the one nor the other. It would be perfect absurdity to speak of *our* coming into the world as *an act of obedience*: and on the hypothesis of Dr. Priestley, to speak of the coming of Christ under such an idea, must be equally absurd.*

We consider Christ’s coming into the world, as an act of *condescending love*; such, indeed, as admits of no parallel. The *riches* of Deity, and the poverty of humanity; the *form of God*, and the *form of a servant*, afford a contrast that fills our souls with grateful astonishment. Dr. Priestley, in the last mentioned performance, acknowledges, that, “The Trinitarian doctrine of the incarnation is calculated forcibly to impress the mind with divine condescension.” He allows the doctrine of the incarnation, as held by the Arians, to have such a tendency in a degree: but he tells Dr. Price, who pleaded this argument against Socinianism, that, “The Trinitarian hypothesis of the supreme God becoming man, and then suffering and dying for us, would no doubt impress the mind more forcibly still.”† This is one allowed source of gratitude and obedience, then, to which the scheme of our adversaries makes no pretence, and for which it can supply nothing ade-

* Def. of Unit. for 1786, p. 103. † Page 103.

quate. But Dr. Priestley thinks to cut up at one stroke, it seems, all the advantages which his opponents might hope to gain from these concessions, by adding ; “ With what unspeakable reverence and devotion do the Catholics eat their Maker ! ” That a kind of superstitious devotion may be promoted by falsehood, is admitted : such was the *voluntary humility* of those who worshipped angels. But, as those characters, with all their pretended humility, were vainly *puffed up with a fleshly mind* ; so, all that appearance of reverence and devotion which is the offspring of superstition, will be found to be something at a great remove from piety or devotedness to God. The superstitions of popery, instead of promoting reverence and devotion, have been thought, by blinding the mind and encumbering it with other things, to destroy them.* There are times in which Dr. Priestley himself “ cannot conceive of any practical use being made of transubstantiation : ” † but now it is put on a level with a doctrine which, it is allowed, “ tends forcibly to impress the mind with divine condescension.”

Once more : We believe that Christ, in laying down his life for us, actually *died as our substitute* ; endured the curse of the divine law, that we might escape it ; was delivered for our offences, that we might be delivered from the wrath to come ; and all this, while we were yet enemies. This is a consideration of the greatest weight : and if we have any justice or ingenuousness about us, love like this must constrain us to live, not to ourselves, but to him that died for us, and rose again ! But, according to our adversaries, Christ died *for us* in no higher sense

* See Mr. Robinson’s Sermon, on 2 Cor. iv. 4, entitled,
The Christian Doctrine of Ceremonies.

† Def. of Unit. for 1786, p. 33.

than a common martyr, who might have sacrificed his life to maintain his doctrine; and by so doing, have set an example for the good of others. If this be all, Why should not we be as much indebted, in point of gratitude, to Stephen, or Paul, or Peter, who also in that manner died for us, as to Jesus Christ? And why is there not the same reason for their death being proposed as a motive for us to live to them, as for his, that we might live to him?

But there is another motive which Dr. Priestley represents as being "that in christianity which is most favourable to virtue; namely, a future state of retribution, grounded on the firm belief of the historical facts recorded in the scriptures; especially in the miracles, the death, and the resurrection of Christ. The man (he adds) who believes these things only, and who, together with this, acknowledges an universal providence, ordering all events; who is persuaded that our very hearts are constantly open to the divine inspection, so that no iniquity, or purpose of it, can escape his observation, will not be a bad man, or a dangerous member of society."* Dr. Priestley, elsewhere, as we have seen, acknowledges that "the love of God in giving his Son to die for us, is *the consideration on which the scriptures always lay the greatest stress*, as a motive to gratitude and obedience;" and yet he speaks here, of "a future state of retribution as being that in christianity which is *most favourable to virtue*." One should think, that what the scriptures always lay the greatest stress upon, should be that in christianity which is most favourable to virtue, be it what it may. But, waving this, let it be considered whether the Calvinistic system has not the advantage even upon this ground. The

* Letter V. to Mr. Burn.

doctrine of a future state of retribution, is a ground possessed by Calvinists, as well as by Socinians ; and, perhaps, it may be found that their views of that subject, and others connected with it, are more favourable to virtue and a holy life, than those of their adversaries.

A motive of no small importance, by which we profess to be influenced, is, *the thought of our own approaching dissolution*. Brethren, if you embrace what is called the Calvinistic view of things, you consider it as your duty and interest to be frequently conversing with mortality. You find such thoughts have a tendency to moderate your attachments to the present world ; to preserve you from being inordinately elated by its smiles, or dejected by its frowns. The consideration of the *time being short*, teaches you to hold all things with a loose hand ; to weep as though you wept not, and to rejoice as though you rejoiced not. You reckon it a mark of true wisdom, to keep the end of your lives habitually in view ; and to follow the advice of the holy scriptures, where you are directed to *go to the house of mourning, rather than to the house of feasting* ; where the godly are described as praying, *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom* ; and God himself as saying, *O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.** But these things, instead of being recommended and urged as motives of piety, are discouraged by Dr. Priestley, who teaches that, *It is not necessary to dwell in our thoughts upon death and futurity, lest it should interrupt the business of life, and cause us to live in perpetual bondage.†*

* Eccles. vii. 2. Ps. xc 12. Deut. xxxii. 29.

† Sermon on the death of Mr. Robinson, p. 7—22.

The scriptures greatly recommend the virtue of *heavenly-mindedness*. They teach christians to consider themselves as strangers and pilgrims on the earth ; to be dead to the world, and to consider their life, or portion, as hid with Christ in God. The spiritual, holy, and happy state, which, according to the Calvinistic system, commences at death, and is augmented at the resurrection, tends more than a little to promote this virtue. If, brethren, you adopt these views of things, you consider the body as a tabernacle, a temporary habitation ; and when this tabernacle is dissolved by death, you expect a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Hence it is, that you desire to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord. There are seasons in which your views are expanded, and your hearts enlarged. At those seasons especially, the world loses its charms, and you see nothing worth living for, except to serve and glorify God. You have, in a degree, the same feelings which the apostle Paul appears to have possessed, when he said, *I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better—For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* But Dr. Priestley teaches, that the heavenly state shall not commence till the resurrection. He does not suppose that there is any state of existence, strictly speaking, wherein we shall be absent from the body, and present with the Lord ; for he considers the soul as having no existence at all separate from the body. He must, therefore, of necessity be a stranger to any such *strait* as that mentioned by the apostle. If the question were put to him, or to any of his sentiments, Whether they would choose to abide longer *in the flesh*, (which might be profitable to their connexions) or immediately depart this life ?

They would be at no loss what to answer. They could not, in any rational sense, consider death as *gain*. It would be impossible for them upon their principles, to desire to depart. Conceiving that they come to the possession of heavenly felicity as soon, if they die fifty years hence, as if they were to die at the present time, they must rather desire to live as long as the course of nature will admit ; so long, however, as life can be considered as preferable to non-existence. It would indicate even a mean and unworthy temper of mind, upon their principles, to be in such a *strait* as Paul describes. It would imply, that they were weary of their work, and at a loss whether they should choose a cessation of being, or to be employed in serving God, and in doing good to their fellow-creatures.

The NATURE and EMPLOYMENTS of the heavenly state, deserve also to be considered. If you adopt the Calvinistic view of things, you consider the enjoyments and employments of that state in a very different light, from that in which Socinian writers represent them. You read in your Bibles, that *the Lord will be our everlasting light, and our God our glory*—that *our life is hid with Christ, in God*—that *when he shall appear, we shall appear with him in glory*—And, that we shall then *be like him, for we shall see him as he is*. Hence you conclude, that A FULL ENJOYMENT OF GOD, AND CONFORMITY TO HIM, ARE THE SUM OF HEAVEN. You read further, that the bliss in reserve for christians, is *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*—that *now we are the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be* : and from hence you naturally conclude, that THE HEAVENLY STATE WILL ABUNDANTLY SURPASS ALL OUR PRESENT CONCEPTS.

TIONS OF IT. Again, you read that *those who shall be found worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God.* Hence you conclude, that THE EMPLOYMENTS AND ENJOYMENTS OF THAT STATE ARE ALTOGETHER SPIRITUAL AND HOLY. You read of our knowledge here being *in part*; but that there we shall *know even as we are known*; and that *the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed us, and lead us to living fountains of water.* Hence you conclude, that we shall not only enjoy greater means of knowledge, which, like a fountain, will flow forever, and assuage our thirsty souls, but, that OUR MINDS WILL BE ABUNDANTLY IRRADIATED, AND OUR HEARTS ENLARGED BY THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST; WHOSE DELIGHTFUL WORK IT WILL BE TO OPEN THE BOOK, AND TO LOOSE THE SEALS; TO UNFOLD THE MYSTERIES OF GOD; AND TO CONDUCT OUR MINDS AMIDST THEIR BOUNDLESS RESEARCHES. Once more: You read concerning those who shall obtain that world and the resurrection, *that they cannot die any more*—that they shall *go no more out*—that the *inheritance* to which they are reserved is *incorruptible, and fadeth not away*—and that the weight of glory which we look for is *eternal.* Hence you conclude, that THE IMMORTALITY PROMISED TO CHRISTIANS IS CERTAIN AND ABSOLUTE.

These are very important matters, and must have a great influence in attracting your hearts toward heaven. These were the things which caused the patriarchs to live like strangers and pilgrims on the earth. They looked for a habitation, a better country, even a heavenly one. These were the things that made the apostles and primitive chris-

tians consider their afflictions as *light* and *momentary*. For this cause, say they, we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

But if you adopt the Socinian view of things, your ideas of the heavenly state, compared with the above, will be miserably flat and cold; and consequently, your affections will be more set on things below, and less on things above. Dr. Priestley, in his *Sermon on the death of Mr. Robinson*, is not only employed in dissuading people from too much thought and fear about death; but from too much *hope* respecting the state beyond it. He seems to fear lest we should form *too high* expectations of heavenly felicity, and so meet with a disappointment. The heaven which he there describes, does not necessarily include *any one of the foregoing ideas*; but might exist if they were all excluded!

Take his own words: "The change of our *condition* by death may not be so great as we are apt to imagine. As our *natures* will not be changed, but only *improved*, we have no reason to think that the *future world* (which will be adapted to our merely improved nature) will be *materially different from this*. And indeed why should we ask, or expect any thing more? If we should still be obliged to provide for our subsistence by exercise, or labour; is that a thing to be complained of by those who are supposed to have acquired fixed habits of industry, becoming rational beings, and who have never been able to bear the languor of absolute rest, or indolence? Our future happiness has, with much reason,

been supposed to arise from an increase of knowledge. But if we should have nothing more than the *means* of knowledge furnished us, as we have here, but be left to our own labour to find it out; is that to be complained of by those who will have acquired a *love of truth*, and a habit of inquiring after it? To make discoveries ourselves, though the search may require time and labour, is unspeakably more pleasing than to learn every thing by the information of others.* If the *immortality* that is promised to us in the gospel should not be *necessary*, and *absolute*, and we should only have the *certain means* of making ourselves immortal, we should have much to be thankful for. What the scriptures inform us concerning a future life is expressed in general terms, and often in figurative language. A more particular knowledge of it is wisely concealed from us.”†

You see, brethren, here is not one word of God, or of Christ, as being the sum and substance of our bliss; and, except that mention is made of our being freed from “imperfections bodily and mental,” the whole consists of mere *natural* enjoyments; differing from the paradise of Mahometans chiefly in this, that their enjoyments are principally sensual, whereas these are mostly intellectual. Those are adapted to gratify the voluptuary, and these the philosopher. Whether such a heaven will suit a holy mind, or be adapted to draw forth our best affections, judge ye.

I am, &c.

* Is not this the rock on which Dr. Priestley and his brethren split? Have they not on this very principle coined a gospel of their own, instead of receiving the instructions of the sacred writers?

LETTER XV.

ON THE RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN SOCINIANISM AND INFIDELITY, AND THE TENDENCY OF THE ONE TO THE OTHER.

Christian Brethren,

I SUPPOSE we may take it for granted, at present, That christianity is favourable to true virtue, and that infidelity is the reverse. If it can be proved, therefore, that Socinianism resembles infidelity in several of its leading features, and has a direct tendency towards it, that will be the same as proving it unfavourable to true virtue.

It has been observed, and I think justly, that "there is no consistent medium between genuine christianity, and infidelity." The smallest departure from the one, is a step towards the other. There are different degrees of approach, but all move on in the same direction. Socinians, however, are not willing to own that their scheme has any such tendency. Dr. Priestley appears to be more than a little hurt, at being represented by the bigots (as he politely calls those who think ill of his principles) as undermining christianity; and intimates, that by their rigid attachment to certain doctrines, some are forced into intidelity, while others are saved from it by his conciliating principles.* Many things to the same

* Here the late Mr. Robinson of Cambridge is brought in as an example; who, as some think, in an excess of complaisance, told the doctor in a private letter, that, "But for his friendly aid, he feared he should have gone from enthusiasm to deism." *Letters to Mr. Burn. Preface.* To say nothing whether the use Dr. Priestley made of this *private Letter* was warrantable, and whether it would not have been full as

purpose are advanced by Mr. Lindsey, in his *Discourse addressed to the congregation, at the Chapel in Essex-Street, Strand ; on resigning the pastoral office among them*. We are to accommodate our religion, it seems, to the notions and inclinations of infidels, and then they would condescend to receive it. This principle of *accommodation* has been already noticed in Letter III. And it has been shown, from the example of the popish missionaries in China, to have no good tendency. To remove every stumbling-block out of the way of infidels, would be to annihilate the gospel. Such attempts also suppose what is not true ; That their not believing in christianity is owing to some fault in the system as generally received, and not to the temper of their own minds. Faults there are, no doubt : but if their hearts were right, they would search the scriptures for themselves, and form their own sentiments according to the best of their capacity.

The near relation of the system of Socinians to that of infidels, may be proved from the agreement of their principles, their prejudices, their spirit, and their success.

First : There is an agreement in their *leading principles*.—One of the most important principles in the scheme of infidelity, it is well known, is, **THE SUFFICIENCY OF HUMAN REASON**. This is the great bulwark of the cause, and the main ground on which

modest to have forborne to publish to the world so high a compliment on himself ; supposing not only the thing itself to have been strictly true, but that the conduct of Dr. Priestley was as strictly proper, what does it prove ? Nothing, except, that the region of Socinianism is so near to that of deism, that now and then an individual, who was on the high road to the one, has stopped short, and taken up with the other.

its advocates proceed in rejecting revelation. If the one, say they, be sufficient, the other is unnecessary. Whether the Socinians do not adopt the same principle, and follow hard after the deists in its application too, we will now inquire.—When Mr. Burn charged Dr. Priestley with making “the reason of the individual the sole umpire in matters of faith;” the doctor denied the charge, and supposed that Mr. Burn must have been “reading the writings of Bolingbroke, Hume, or Voltaire, and have imagined them to be his:” as if none but professed infidels maintained that principle. This, however, is allowing it to be a principle pertaining to infidelity; and of such importance, it should seem, as to distinguish it from christianity. If it should prove, therefore, that the same principle occupies a place, yea, and an equally important place in the Socinian scheme, it will follow that Socinianism and deism must be nearly allied. But Dr. Priestley, as was said, denies the charge; and tells us that he “has written a great deal to prove *the insufficiency of human reason*:” he also accuses Mr. Burn of “the grossest and most unfounded calumny,” in charging such a principle upon him.*

If what Mr. Burn alleges, be “a gross and unfounded calumny,” it is rather extraordinary that such a number of respectable writers should have suggested the same thing. I suppose there has been scarcely a writer of any note among us, but who, if this be calumny, has calumniated the Socinians. If there be any credit due to Trinitarian authors, they certainly have hitherto *understood* matters in a different light from that in which they are here represented. They have supposed, whether rightly or not, that their opponents

in general do hold the very principle which Dr. Priestley so strongly disavows.

But this is not all. If what Mr. Burn alleges be a gross and unfounded calumny, it is still more extraordinary, that Socinian writers should calumniate themselves. Mr. Robinson, whom Dr. Priestley glories in as his convert, affirms much the same thing, and that in his *History of Baptism*; a work published after he had adopted the Socinian system. In answering an objection brought against the Baptists as being enthusiasts, he asks; “Were Castelio, and Servetus, Socinus, and Crellius enthusiasts? On the contrary, they are taxed with attributing *too much to reason*, AND THE SUFFICIENCY OF REASON IS THE SOUL OF THEIR SYSTEM.”* If the last member of this sentence be true, and if Dr. Priestley have maintained the same principle as much as any of his predecessors; then is what Mr. Burn alleges true also, and no calumny.—Further: If Mr. Robinson’s words be true, the system of a Socinus, and of a Bolingbroke, however they may differ in some particulars, cannot be very wide asunder. They may be *two bodies*; but the difference cannot be very material, so long as those bodies are inhabited by ONE SOUL.

But was not Mr. Robinson mistaken? Has he not inadvertently granted that which ought not in justice to have been granted? Suppose this to be a fact, why might not the same construction have been put upon what is alleged by Mr. Burn, and other Trinitarian writers, instead of calling it by the hard name of “gross and unfounded calumny?” If we say no worse of our opponents than they say of themselves, they can have no just grounds of complaint; at least, they should complain with less severity.

Further: If Mr. Robinson was mistaken, and if Dr. Priestley do really maintain *the insufficiency of human reason* in matters of religion; it will follow, after all that he has pleaded in behalf of reason, that he is no better friend to it than other people. The doctor often reminds his Calvinistic opponents of an *old saying*, that “No man is against reason, till reason is against him.” Old sayings, to be sure, prove much in argument. This old saying, however, is very just, provided the term *reason* be understood of *the real fitness of things*. Dr. Priestley’s opponents are not against reason, in this sense of the word; but against setting up *the reason of the individual* as umpire in matters of faith: and this, we see, is no more than the doctor himself disavows; in that he supposes a principle of this kind is no where to be found, except in such writings as those of Bolingbroke, or Hume, or of Voltaire. He tells us that he has “written much to prove the *insufficiency* of human reason, and the necessity of divine revelation.” He is then professedly *against reason* in the same sense as his opponents are; and the deists might remind him of his “old saying” with as much propriety as he reminds other people of it.

Once more: If Mr. Robinson was mistaken, and if his concession be beyond the bounds of justice and propriety; it will follow, that notwithstanding what Dr. Priestley has said of *saving him from infidelity*, he was not saved from it after all. Whether Mr. Robinson’s words convey a just idea of Socinianism, or not, they must be allowed to express what were *his own ideas* of it. Whatever, therefore, Dr. Priestley believes, *he* appears to have believed in *the sufficiency of reason*. But if none besides infidels maintain that principle, it must follow, that Dr. Priestley’s glory-

ing in Mr. Robinson is vain : and that, so far from saving him from infidelity, as he boasts, he was not saved from it ; but was the disciple of a Bolingbroke, of a Hume, or of a Voltaire, rather than of a Priestley.

But, after all, was Mr. Robinson indeed mistaken ? Is not “ the sufficiency of reason the soul of the Socinian system ? ” It is true, Socinians do not openly plead, as do the deists, that reason is *so* sufficient, as that revelation is unnecessary ; nor is it supposed that Mr. Robinson meant to acknowledge that they did. But do they not constantly advance what amounts to the same thing ? I do not know what publications Dr. Priestley refers to, when he speaks of having written a great deal to prove the “ insufficiency of human reason, and the necessity of divine revelation : ” but if it be upon the same principles as those which he avows in his other productions, I do not see how he can have proved his point. According to these principles, the sacred writers were as liable to err as other men, and in some instances actually did err ; producing “ lame accounts, improper quotations, and inconclusive reasonings ; ” and that it is the province of reason not only to judge of their credentials, but of the particular doctrines which they advance.* Now, this is not only “ making the reason of the individual the sole umpire in matters of faith,” but virtually rendering revelation unnecessary. If the reason of the individual be to sit supreme judge, and insist that every doctrine which revelation proposes shall approve itself to its dictates, or be rejected ; the necessity of the latter might as well be totally denied. If it be necessary, however, it is no otherwise than as a French parliament used

* See Letter xii.

to be necessary to a French king : not in order to dictate to his majesty, but to afford a sanction to his resolutions ; or, at most, to tender him a little advice, in order to assist him in forming his judgment ; which advice, notwithstanding, he might receive or reject, as best suited his inclination.

Dr. Priestley often suggests, that he makes no other use of human reason than all protestants make against the papists, when pleading against the doctrine of transubstantiation ; that is, where the literal sense of a text involves an absurdity, he so far follows the dictates of reason as to understand it figuratively. But this is not the case : for the question here does not at all respect the *meaning* of scripture, whether it should be understood literally or figuratively : but whether its *allowed* meaning ought to be accepted as truth, any further than it corresponds with our pre-conceived notions of what is reason ? According to the principles and charges before cited, it ought not ; and this is not only summoning revelation to the bar of our own understandings, but actually passing sentence against it.

The near affinity of Socinianism to deism is so manifest, that is in vain to disown it. Nobody supposes them to be entirely the same. One acknowledges Christ to be a true prophet ; the other considers him as an impostor : but the denial of the proper inspiration of the scriptures, with the receiving of some part of them as true, and the rejecting of other parts even of the same books as “ lame accounts, improper quotations, and inconclusive reasonings,” naturally lead to deism. Deists themselves do not so reject the bible as to disbelieve every historical event which is there recorded. They would not deny, I suppose, that there were such characters in the

world as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus ; and that some things which are written concerning each, are true.

In short, they take what they like best, as they would from any other ancient history, and reject the rest : and what does Dr. Priestley even pretend to more ? He does not reject *so much* as a deist : he admits various articles which the other denies ; but the difference is only in degree. The relation between the first and leading principles of their respective systems is so near, that one spirit may be said to pervade them both ; or, to use the imagery of Mr. Robinson, one soul inhabits these different bodies. The opposition between faith and unbelief is so great in the scriptures, that no less than salvation is promised to the one, and damnation threatened to the other : but if they were no further asunder than Socinianism and deism, it is passing strange that their consequences should be so widely different.

Another leading principle common to Socinians and deists, is, *The non-importance of principle itself, in order to the enjoyment of the divine favour.*—Nothing is more common than for professed infidels to exclaim against christianity, on account of its rendering the belief of the gospel necessary to salvation. Lord Shaftesbury insinuates, that the heathen magistrates, in the first ages of christianity, might have been justly offended “ with a notion which treated them, and all men, as profane, impious, and damned, who entered not into particular modes of worship, of which there had been formerly so many thousand kinds instituted, all of them compatible, and sociable, till that time.”* To the same purpose is what Mr. Paine advances : who, I imagine, would make no pretence of friendship

* Characteristics, Vol. 1, § 3.

towards christianity. “ If we suppose a large family of children, (says he) who on any particular day, or particular circumstance, made it a custom to present to their parents some token of their affection and gratitude, each of them would make a different offering, and most probably in a different manner. Some would pay their congratulations in themes of verse, or prose, by some little devices as their genius dictated, or according to what they thought would please; and, perhaps, the least of all, not able to do any of those things, would ramble into the garden or the field, and gather what it thought the prettiest flower it could find, though, perhaps, it might be but a simple weed. The parent would be more gratified by such a variety, than if the whole of them had acted on a concerted plan, and each had made exactly the same offering.”* And this he applies, not merely to the diversified modes of worshipping God, which come within the limits of the divine command; but to the various ways in which mankind have in all ages and nations worshipped, or pretended to worship a deity. The sentiment which this writer, and all others of his stamp, wish to propagate, is, That in all modes of religion men may be very sincere: and that, being so, all are alike acceptable to God. This is infidelity undisguised. Yet this is no more than Dr. Priestley has advanced in his *Differences in Religious Opinions*. “ If we can be so happy, (he says) as to believe, that—all differences in modes of worship may be only the different methods by which different men (who are equally *the offspring of God*) are endeavouring to honour and obey their common parent, our differences of opinion would have no tendency to lessen our mutual love and esteem.”†

* Rights of Man, Pt. II. near the conclusion. † Sect. II.

Nor is Dr. Priestley the only writer of the party who unites with the author of *The Age of Reason*, in maintaining that it matters not what religion we are of, if we be but sincere in it. Dr. Toulmin has laboured to defend this notion, and to prove from Acts x. 34, 35. and Rom. ii. 6, 10, 12. that it was maintained by Peter and Paul.* But before he had pretended to palm it upon them, he should have made it evident that Cornelius, when he *feared God and worked righteousness*, and those Gentiles, when they are supposed to have *worked good*, and to be heirs of *glory, honour, and peace*, were each of them actually living in idolatry ; and being sincere, that God was well pleased with it. It is no part of the question, whether heathens may be saved ; but whether they may be saved *in their heathenism* ; and whether heathenism and christianity be only different modes of worshipping our common Father, and alike acceptable to him ?

Several other principles might be mentioned in which Socinians and deists are agreed ; and in which the same objections that are made by the one against Calvinism, are made by the other against the holy scriptures. Do Socinians reject the Calvinistic system, because it represents God as a vindictive Being ? For the same reason the scriptures themselves are rejected by the deists. Are the former offended with Calvinism, on account of the doctrines of atonement, and of divine sovereignty ? The latter are equally offended with the Bible for the same reasons. They know very well that these doctrines are contained in the scriptures ; but they dislike them, and reject the scriptures partly on account of them. The sufficiency of repentance to secure the divine favour—the evil of

* Practical Efficacy, pp. 164, 165, 2d ed.

sin consisting merely in its tendency to injure the creature—all punishment being for the good of the offender, as well as for the public good—with various other principles, which are opposed in these Letters in defence of Calvinism; are the same things for substance, which those who have written against the deists, have had to encounter, when defending revelation.* It is a consolation to us to trace these likenesses, as it affords a presumption that our sentiments accord with the scriptures, being liable to the same objections.

Socinian writers not only make the same objections to Calvinism, which deists make to revelation; but, in some instances, have so far forgotten themselves as to unite with the latter in pointing their objections against revelation itself. Steinbart and Semler (as quoted in Letter XII.) have fallen foul upon the writers of the old and New Testament. “Moses, (says the former) according to the childish conceptions of the Jews in his days, paints God as agitated by violent affections; partial to one people, and hating all other nations.”—“Peter, (says the latter, 2 Epis. i. 21.) speaks according to the conception of the Jews, and the prophets may have delivered the offspring of their own brains as divine revelations.”† The infidelity of Socinians is frequently covered with a very thin disguise; but here the veil is entirely thrown off. One thing, however, is sufficiently evident; while they vent their antipathy against the holy scriptures in such indecent language, they be-

* See Leland's Defence of Christianity, against Tindall, Vol I Chap. 4, 6, 8.

† Dr. Erskine's Sketches and Hints of Church History, No. III. pp. 65—71.

tray a consciousness that the contents of that sacred volume are against them.

The likeness of Socinianism to deism will further appear, if we consider, Secondly, The similarity of their *prejudices*.—The peculiar prejudices of deists are drawn, I think, with great justness, by Dr. Priestley himself. “There is no class or description of men, (he observes) but what are subject to peculiar prejudices, and every prejudice must operate as an obstacle to the reception of some truth. It is in vain for unbelievers to pretend to be free from prejudices. They may indeed be free from those of the vulgar, but they have others peculiar to themselves; and the very affectation of being free from vulgar prejudices, and of being wiser than the rest of mankind, must indispose them to the admission even of truth, if it should happen to be with the common people. The suspicion that the faith of the vulgar is superstitious and false, is, no doubt, often well-founded; because they, of course, maintain the *oldest opinions*, while the speculative part of mankind are making new discoveries in science. Yet we often find that they who pride themselves on their being the farthest removed from superstition in some things, are the greatest dupes to it in others; and it is not universally true that all old opinions are false, and all new ones well-founded. An aversion to the creed of the vulgar may therefore mislead a man, and from a fondness for singularity he may be singularly in the wrong.”*

Let those who are best acquainted with Socinians judge whether this address, with a very few alterations, be not equally adapted to them, as to professed unbelievers. We know who they are, besides avowed infi-

* Letters to a Phil. Unb. Pt. ii. Let. v.

dels, who affect to be “emancipated from *vulgar prejudices* and *popular superstitions*, and to embrace a rational system of faith.”* It is very common with Socinian writers, as much as it is with deists, to value themselves on being wiser than the rest of mankind, and to despise the judgment of plain christians, as being the judgment of the *vulgar* and the *populace*. It is true, Dr. Priestley has addressed letters to the common people at Birmingham, and has complimented them with being “capable of judging in matters of religion and government.” However, it is no great compliment to christians in general of that description, to suppose, as he frequently does, not only that the Trinitarian system, but every other, was the invention of learned men in different ages, and that the vulgar have always been led by their influence. “The creed of the vulgar of the present day, (he observes) is to be considered not so much as *their* creed, for they were not the inventors of it, as that of the thinking and inquisitive in some former period. For those whom we distinguish by the appellation of the *vulgar*, are not those who introduce any new opinions, but who receive them from others, of whose judgment they have been led to think highly.”† On this principle, Dr. Priestley somewhere expresses his persuasion of the future prevalence of Unitarianism. He grants that, at present, the body of common christians are against it; but as the learned and the speculative are verging towards it, he supposes the other will in time follow them. What is this but supposing them incapable of forming religious sentiments for themselves; as if the Bible were to them a sealed book, and they had only to believe the system that happened to

* Mr. Belsham’s Sermon, p. 4—32.

† Letters to a Phil. Unb. Pt. ii. Let. v.

be in fashion, or rather *to have been* in fashion some years before they were born, and to dance after the pipe of learned men ?

It is acknowledged that, in matters of human science, common people, having no standard to judge by, are generally led by the learned ; but surely it is somewhat different in religion, where we have a standard, and one too that is adapted to the understanding of the simple. However many people may be led implicitly by others, yet there will always be a number of plain, intelligent, serious christians, who will read the bible and judge for themselves ; and christians of this description will always have a much greater influence, even upon those who do not judge for themselves, than mere speculative men, whom the most ignorant cannot but perceive to be wanting in serious religion, and respect to mankind ; and while this is the case, there is no great danger of the body of common christians becoming Socinians.

Thirdly : There is a *bold, profane, and daring spirit*, discovered in the writings of infidels ; a spirit that fears not to speak of sacred things with the most indecent freedom.—They love to speak of Christ with a sneer, calling him *the Carpenter's son, the Galilean*, or some such name, which in their manner of expressing it, conveys an idea of contempt. Though Socinians do not go such lengths as these, yet they follow hard after them in their profane and daring manner of speaking. Were it proper to refer to the speeches of private individuals, language might be produced very little inferior in contempt to any of the foregoing modes of expression : and even some of those who have appeared as authors, have discovered a similar temper. Besides the examples of Engedin, Gagneius, Steinbart, and Semler, (as quoted in Let. xii.) the *magnanimity*

which has been ascribed to Dr. Priestley, for censuring the Mosaic narrative of the fall of man, calling it “a LAME account,” is an instance of the same irreverent spirit.

Fourthly : The alliance of Socinianism to deism may be inferred from this, That the *success* of the one bears a proportion to that of the other, and resembles it in the most essential points.—Socinians are continually boasting of their success, and of the great increase of their numbers ; so also are the deists, and I suppose with equal reason. The number of the latter has certainly increased in the present century, in as great, if not a greater proportion, than the former. The truth is, a spirit of infidelity is the main temptation of the present age, as a persecuting superstition was of ages past. This spirit has long gone forth into the world. In different denominations of men it exists in different degrees, and appears to be permitted to try them that dwell upon the earth. Great multitudes are carried away with it ; and no wonder : for it disguises itself under a variety of specious names ; such as *liberality*, *candour*, and *charity*, by which it imposes upon the unwary. It flatters human pride, calls evil propensity *nature*, and gives loose to its dictates ; and in proportion as it prevails in the judgments, as well as in the hearts of men, it serves to abate the fear of death and judgment, and so makes them more cheerful than they otherwise would be.

It is also worthy of notice, that the success of Socinianism and deism has been amongst the same sort of people ; namely, *men of a speculative turn of mind*. Dr. Priestley somewhere observes, that “learned men begin more and more to suspect the doctrine of the Trinity :” and possibly it may be so.

But then it might with equal truth be affirmed, that learned men begin more and more to suspect christianity. Dr. Priestley himself acknowledges, that "among those who are called philosophers, the unbelievers are the crowd."* It is true, he flatters himself, that their numbers *will* diminish, and that "the evidences of christianity will meet with a more impartial examination in the present day, than they have done in the last fifty years." But this is mere conjecture, such as hath no foundation in fact. We may as well flatter ourselves that Socinians will diminish : there is equal reason for the one as for the other. It is not impossible that the number of both may be diminished in some future time, but when that time shall come, is not for us to say.

It may be suggested, that it is a circumstance not much in favour either of the doctrines of the Trinity, or of christianity, that such a number of philosophers and learned men suspect them. But unfavourable as this circumstance may appear to some, there are others who view it in a very different light. The late Mr. Robinson of Cambridge always contended, that common christians were in a more favourable state for the discovery of religious truth, than either the rich or the learned. And Dr. Priestley not only admits, but accounts for it. "Learned men (he says) have *prejudices* peculiar to themselves ; and the very affectation of being free from vulgar prejudice, and of being wiser than the rest of mankind, must indispose them to the admission even of truth, if it should happen to be with the common people." If *not many wise men after the flesh* are found among the friends of christianity, or of what we account its peculiar doctrines, is it any other than what might have been

* Let. to a Phil. Unb, Vol. ii. p. 32.

alleged against the primitive church? The things of God in their times were *hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes*, and that because it seemed *good in his sight*.

It is further worthy of notice, that the same *disregard of religion in general*, which is allowed by our opponents to be favourable to Socinianism, is equally favourable to deism. Dr. *Priestley* describes unbelievers of a certain age amongst us, as “having heard christianity from their infancy, as having in general believed it for some time, and *as not coming to disbelieve it till they had long disregarded it.*”^{*} A disregard of christianity, then, preceded their openly rejecting it, and embracing the scheme of infidelity. Now this is the very process of a great number of Socinian converts, as both the doctor and Mr. Belsham elsewhere acknowledge. It is by a disregard of all religion that men become infidels; and it is by the same means that others become Socinians.

The foregoing observations may suffice to shew the *resemblance* of Socinianism to deism. It remains for me to consider the *tendency* of the one to the other.

Dr. Priestley seems to admit that his scheme approaches nearer to that of unbelievers than ours; but then he disowns its having any tendency on that account to lead men to infidelity. On the contrary, he retorts the charge upon his opponents, and asserts his own scheme to have an opposite effect. “An enemy, as I am considered to christianity, by some, (says he) I have saved many from that infidelity into which the bigots are forcing them.” The case of the late Mr. Robinson is here introduced as an example to confirm this assertion. The reasoning of Dr.

^{*} Let. to a Phil. Unb. Vol. ii. pref. p. ix.

Priestley on this subject resembles that of Abp. *Laud* on another. When accused of leaning to popery, he denied the charge, and gave in a list of *twenty-one* persons whom he had not merely saved from going over to that religion, but actually *converted* them from it to the protestant faith.* Yet few thinking people imagine the principles of *Laud* to have been very unfriendly to popery; much less that they were adapted to save men from it.

That Socinianism has a direct tendency to deism, will appear from the following considerations. First: By giving up the plenary inspiration of the scriptures, and allowing them to be the production of fallible men, (of men who, though too honest knowingly to impose upon others, were, notwithstanding, so far under the influence of inattention, of prejudice, and of misinformation, as to be capable of being imposed upon themselves) Socinians furnish infidels with a handle for rejecting them.—To give up the plenary inspiration of the scriptures, is to give them up as *the word of God*, and as *binding upon the consciences of men*; to which our opponents apparently have no objection. They are seldom, if ever, known to warn mankind that the rejection of the holy scriptures will endanger their eternal welfare. Nor can they do so consistently with what they elsewhere plead for, that “all differences in modes of worship may be only different modes of endeavouring to honour and obey our common Parent.” Under the pretence of appealing to the *reason* of unbelievers, they neglect to address themselves to their hearts and consciences. If the cause of infidelity lie in the want of evidence, or if those who leaned towards it, were ingenuous and disinterested inquirers after truth, solemn warnings

* See Neale's Hist. of the Puritans, Vol. iii, Index, Art. *Laud*.

might be less necessary. But if it lie in the temper of their hearts, which blinds their minds to the most convincing proofs ; their hearts and consciences must be addressed, as well as their understandings. The sacred writers and preachers always proceeded upon this principle. This only will account for such language as the following : *The blindness of their HEART—Lest they should understand with their HEART, and be converted—REPENT and believe the gospel—If God peradventure will give them REPENTANCE to the acknowledging of the truth.* This was the method of John the Baptist, of Christ, and his apostles, in their addresses to unbelievers : and whatever addresses are made to infidels, whether Jews or deists, in which the *sin* of unbelief and the *danger* of persisting in it, are not insisted on, they will tend to harden them in infidelity, rather than to recover them out of it. Dr. Priestley in effect acknowledges, that the cause of infidelity lies in the temper of the heart : and yet, when he addresses himself to infidels, he seems to consider them as merely in want of evidence, and fosters in them an idea of their security, notwithstanding their rejection of the gospel. This is manifestly the tendency of his *Letters to the philosophers and politicians of France.*

Dr. Priestley acknowledges that men *seldom reject christianity in theory, till they have long disregarded it in practice.** That is, they seldom believe it to be false, without their hearts being fully inclined to have it so. Let us then consider a character of this description in his examination of christianity. He has long disregarded the practice of it, and begins now to hesitate about its truth. If he read a defence of it upon our principles, he will find

* Let. to a Phil. Unb. vol. ii. pref. p. ix.

the authority of Heaven vindicated ; his own sceptical spirit condemned ; and is warned that he fall not upon a rock that will prove his eternal ruin. He throws it aside in resentment ; calls the writer a bigot ; and considers the *warning* given him, as an insult to his dignity. Still, however, there is a sting left behind, which he knows not how to extract ; a something which says within him, *How, if it should be true ?* He takes up a defence of christianity upon Socinian principles : suppose Dr. Priestley's *Letters to the Philosophers and Politicians of France*. He is now brought to a better humour. Here is no *threatening* ; no imminent danger. The sting is extracted. The reasoning in many parts is plausible ; but having long wished to disbelieve christianity, it makes little or no impression upon him ; especially as it seems to be of no *great* consequence if he do so. It is only rejecting that entirely, which professed christians reject in part. It is only throwing off the testimony and opinions of fallible men. What will be his next step, is not very difficult to conjecture.

By allowing part of the gospels to be *spurious*, Socinian writers enable the *Jews* to ask, with an air of triumph, "How are we sure that the remainder is authentic ?"* We are often told that the *Jews* can never embrace what is called orthodox christianity, because of its inconsistency with one of the first principles of their religion, the *unity* of God. We do not ask them, however, to give up the unity of God. On the contrary, we are fully persuaded that our principles are entirely consistent with it. But this is more than our opponents can say, with regard to the inspiration of the scriptures ; a principle as sacred, and as important with the *Jews*, as the unity of God itself. Were they to

* Mr. D. Levi's Letters to Dr. Priestley, p. 82.

embrace Dr. Priestley's notions of christianity, they must give up this principle, and consider their own sacred writings in a much meaner light than they at present do. They have no conception of the Old Testament being a mere authentic history of past transactions; but profess to receive it as the very *word of God; the infallible rule of faith and practice*. Whenever they shall receive the New Testament, there is reason to conclude it will be under the same character, and for the same purposes. While they consider their own scriptures as divinely inspired, and hear professed christians acknowledge, that "part of their gospels is spurious;" they will be tempted to look down upon christianity with scorn, and so be hardened in their infidelity.

Secondly: If the sacred writings be not received for the purposes for which they were professedly given, and for which they were actually appealed to by Christ and his apostles, they are in effect rejected: and those who pretend to embrace them for other purposes, will themselves be found to have passed the boundaries of christianity, and to be walking in the paths of infidelity.—We have seen in Letter XII. that the scriptures *profess* to be *the word of God, and the rule of faith and practice*. Now, if any man believe in revelation, he must receive it as being what it professes to be, and for all the purposes for which it professes to have been written. *The Monthly Review* suggests, that the scriptures were never designed to settle disputed theories, or to decide speculative controverted questions even in religion and morality."* But if so, what must we think of their assuming to be the rule of faith and practice? What must we think of Christ and his apostles, who appealed to them

* Mon. Rev. Enlarged. Vol. x. p. 357.

for the truth of their doctrines, and the goodness of their precepts? On the principles of our opponents, they must have been either weak or wicked. If they considered them as the standard of faith and practice, they must have been weak. If they did not, and yet appealed to them as a decisive test, they were certainly wicked. In either case, their testimony is unworthy of regard; which is downright infidelity.

Thirdly: By the degrading notions which Socinians entertain of the person of Christ, they do what in them lies to lessen the sin of rejecting him; and afford the adversaries of the gospel a ground for accusing him of presumption; which must necessarily harden them in unbelief.—The *Jews* consider their nation, according to the sentiments of orthodox christians, as lying under the charge “of crucifying the LORD and SAVIOUR of the world:” but, according to those of Dr. Priestley as only having crucified “a *prophet*, that was sent to them in the first instance.”* Such a consideration diminishes the degree of their guilt; tends to render them more indifferent; and, consequently, must harden them in infidelity.—By considering our Lord as *merely* a prophet, Socinians also furnish the Jews with the charge of *presumption*; a weighty objection, indeed, against his Messiahship! “He preached *himself*, (says Mr. Levi) as *the light of the world*; which is an instance not to be paralleled in scripture: for the duty of a prophet consisted in his delivery of God’s word or message to the people; not in presumptuously preaching himself. Again, we meet with the same example in John xiv. 6. where Jesus preaches *himself*, as *the way, the truth, and the life*.” From all which he concludes; “It is manifest that he was not sent by God, to us as a prophet, seeing he was so deficient in the es-

* Mr. David Levi’s Letters to Dr. Priestley, p. 14.

sential character of a prophet.”*—How Dr. Priestley, upon his principles, will be able to answer this reasoning, I cannot tell. Though he has written a reply to Mr. Levi, I observe he has passed over this part of the subject very lightly; offering nothing that sufficiently accounts for our Lord’s preaching himself as *the light of the world, the way, the truth, and the life*, upon the supposition of his being merely a prophet.

Fourthly: The progress which Socinianism has made, has generally been towards infidelity.—The ancient Socinians, though they went great lengths, are, nevertheless, far out-done by the moderns. If we look over the *Racovian Catechism*, printed at Amsterdam in 1652, we shall find such sentiments as the following. “No suspicion can possibly creep into the mind concerning those authors, (the sacred writers) as if they had not had exact cognizance of the things which they described; in that some of them were eye and ear witnesses of the things which they set down, and the others were fully and accurately informed by them concerning the same.—It is altogether incredible, that God, whose goodness and providence are immense, hath suffered those writings wherein he hath proposed his will, and the way to eternal life, and which through the succession of so many ages have by all the godly been received and approved as such, to be any ways corrupted.”† I need not go about to prove that these sentiments are betrayed into the hands of infidels by modern Socinians. Dr. Priestley, (as we have seen in Letter xii.) supposes the sacred writers to have written upon subjects “to which they had not given much attention, and concerning which they had not the means of exact information:” and, in such cases, considers

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* Levi’s Letters, p. 24.

† Racov. Catechism, p. 3, 4.

himself at liberty to disregard their productions. Instead of maintaining that the sacred writings cannot have been corrupted, modern Socinians are continually labouring to prove that they *are* so.

Some, who are better acquainted with Socinians and Deists than I profess to be, have observed, that it is very common for those who go over to infidelity to pass through Socinianism in their way. If this be the case, it is no more than may be expected according to the natural course of things. It is not common, I believe, for persons who go over to Socinianism, to go directly from Calvinism, but through one or other of the different stages of Arminianism, or Arianism, or both. Dr. Priestley was once, as he himself informs us, “a Calvinist, and that of the straitest sect. Afterwards, (he adds) he became a high Arian, next a low Arian, and then a Socinian, and then in a little time a Socinian of the lowest kind, in which Christ is considered as a mere man, the son of Joseph and Mary, and naturally as fallible and peccable as Moses or any other prophet :” to which he might have added, and in which the plenary inspiration of the scriptures is given up.* The doctor also informs us that he “does not know when his creed will be fixed.”† And yet he tells us in his volume of Sermons, (page 95) that “Unitarians are not apt to entertain any doubt of the truth of their principles.” But this, I suppose, is to be understood of their principles only in one point of view ; namely, as they are opposed to what is commonly called orthodoxy : for as they are opposed to infidelity, they are apt to entertain doubts concerning them as much, and perhaps more, than any other men ; and in that line of improvement to hold themselves open to the reception of great-

* Letters to a Phil. Unb. Pt. ii. p. 33—35.

† Def. of Unit. for 1787, p. 111.

er and greater illuminations. It is in this direction that Dr. Priestley has generally moved hitherto ; and should he, before he fixes his creed, go one degree further, is there any doubt where that degree will land him ? Should it be upon the shores of downright infidelity, it can afford no greater matter of surprise to the christian world, than that of an Arian becoming a Socinian, or a Deist an Atheist.

By the following extract from a letter, which I received from a gentleman of candour and veracity, and extensive acquaintance in the literary world, it appears that several of the most eminent characters amongst professed unbelievers, in the present age, were but a few years ago in the scheme of Socinus : “ I think I may say without exaggeration, that of my acquaintance the greater part of *literary* men who have become Unitarians, are either sceptics, or strongly tending that way. I could instance in — — — — — and many others. About four months ago, I had a pretty long conversation with one of the above gentlemen (as intelligent a man as any I know) on this subject. He reminded me of a conversation that had passed betwixt us about a year and a half before, in which I had observed, there was a near affinity between Unitarianism and Deism ; and told me he was then rather surprised I should suppose so, but that now he was completely of that opinion ; and that, from very extensive observations, there was nothing he was more certain of, than that the one led to the other. He remarked how much Dr. Priestley was mistaken in supposing he could, by cashiering orthodoxy, form, what he called, rational christians ; for that after following him thus far, they would be almost sure to carry their speculations to a still greater extent. All the professed unbe-

lievers I have met with, rejoice in the spread of Unitarianism, as favourable to their views."

Christian brethren, permit me to request that the subject may be seriously considered. Whether the foregoing positions be sufficiently proved, it becomes not me to decide. A reflection or two, however, may be offered upon supposition that they are so, and with these I shall conclude.

First : If that system which embraces the Deity and atonement of Christ, with other correspondent doctrines, be friendly to a life of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness ; it must be of God, and it becomes us to abide by it ; not because it is the doctrine of Calvin, or of any other man that was uninspired, but as being *The gospel which we have received from Christ and his apostles ; wherein we stand, and by which we are saved.*

Secondly : If that system of religion which rejects the Deity and atonement of Christ, with other correspondent doctrines, be unfriendly to the conversion of sinners to a life of holiness, and of professed unbelievers to faith in Christ ; if it be a system which irreligious men are the first, and serious christians the last to embrace ; if it be found to relax the obligations to virtuous affection and behaviour, by relaxing the great standard of virtue itself ; if it promote neither love to God under his true character, nor benevolence to men, as it is exemplified in the spirit of Christ and of his apostles ; if it lead those who embrace it to be wise in their own eyes, and instead of humbly deprecating God's righteous displeasure, even in their dying moments, arrogantly to challenge his justice ; if the charity which it inculcates be founded in an indifference to divine truth ; if it be inconsistent with ardent love to Christ, and veneration for the holy scriptures ; if the happiness which

it promotes be at variance with the joys of the gospel : and, finally, if it diminish the motives to gratitude, obedience, and heavenly-mindedness, and have a natural tendency to infidelity ; it must be an immoral system, and consequently not of God. It is not the gospel of Christ, but *another gospel*. Those who preach it, preach *another Jesus*, whom the apostles did not preach ; and those who receive it, receive *another spirit*, which they never imbibed. It is not the light which cometh from above, but a cloud of darkness that hath arisen from beneath, tending to eclipse it. It is not the high-way of truth, which is a way of holiness, but a bye-path of error, which misleads the unwary traveller ; and of which, as we value our immortal interests, it becomes us to beware. We need not be afraid of evidence, or of free inquiry. For, if irreligious men be the first, and serious christians be the last, who embrace the Socinian system ; it is easy to perceive, that the avenues which lead to it are not, as its abettors would persuade you to think, an openness to conviction, or a free and impartial inquiry after truth ; but *a heart secretly disaffected to the true character and government of God, and dissatisfied with the gospel-way of salvation.*

I am,

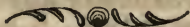
Christian Brethren,

Respectfully and affectionately,

Your's,

ANDREW FULLER.

POSTSCRIPT.



ON the first appearance of the foregoing Letters, in 1793, some of the most respectable characters amongst the Socinians, and who have since affected to treat them with contempt, acknowledged that they were "well worthy of their attention." No answer, however, appeared to them till 1796, when Dr. Toulmin published his *Practical Efficacy of the Unitarian doctrine*, and Mr. Kentish his Sermon on *The moral tendency of the genuine christian doctrine*. To these publications a reply was written in 1797, entitled, *Socinianism indefensible, on the ground of its moral tendency*. Mr. Kentish wrote again, and Dr. Toulmin has lately published a second edition of his piece, with large additions.—I had no inclination to add any thing in reply to Mr. Kentish, being well satisfied that the public should judge from the evidence that was before them. And as to Dr. Toulmin, his second edition is like his first, full of irrelative matter.

Having been charged with *shifting the ground of the argument, and begging the question*, this writer labours to persuade his readers that he has done neither. "He did not intend, (he says) nor profess to give a *full* and *minute* answer to Mr. Fuller's tract. He meant not *much more* than to take an *occasion* from that publication to bring the general question, namely, the practical efficacy of the Unitarian doctrine, to the test of scriptural facts."* This is ac-

* *Practical Efficacy*, p. 133. sec. ed.

knowledging, that *if he had* professed to give a proper answer to the work, he would have been obliged by the laws of just reasoning to keep to the ground of his opponent. But intending only to write a piece that should bear some *allusion* to it, he considered himself at liberty to choose his own ground. But if this were his intention, Why did he profess, at his outset, to “enter the lists” with me; and to comprehend in his performance “the main point to which a reply to my Letters need be directed?” If this be not professing to answer a work, nothing is.

The design of Dr. Toulmin seems to have been very complex, and his account of it has much the appearance of evasion. He did not intend to give a *full and minute* answer: Did he mean to give *any* answer; or only to write a piece which might *pass for an answer*? He meant not *much more* than thus and thus: Did he mean *any* more? If he did, he ought to have kept to the proper ground of reasoning; or, if he thought it unfair, to have proved it so.

But he had a right, he says, to choose the ground of his argument, as well as I. Doubtless, if he had chosen to write upon any subject, *without professing to answer another*, or wishing his performance to pass for an answer, he had: but if at the outset he propose to “enter the lists” with an opponent, and to comprehend “all that to which a reply to his performance need be directed,” it is otherwise. If a christian divine wish to write in favour of christianity, he is at liberty to choose his ground. He may fix, as Bp. Newton has, on the argument from *prophecy*. But if a deist come after him, professing to “enter the lists” with him, and to comprehend in his performance “all that to which a reply to the work of his opponent need be directed,” he is obliged by the

rules of just reasoning, either to examine the arguments of his adversary, or attempt to overturn the principle on which they rest. If, instead of trying the truth of the christian religion by the fulfilment of *prophecy*, he were to fill up his pages by arguing on the improbability of *miracles*, or the *sufficiency of the light of nature*, What would Dr. Toulmin say to him? And if in order to excuse himself, he should allege that he did not intend, nor profess to give a *full* and *minute* answer to his antagonist; that he meant not *much more* than to take an *occasion* from his publication to bring forward the general question between christians and deists, on the necessity of a divine revelation, Might he not better have held his peace? Must not judicious persons, even amongst his friends, clearly perceive that he has betrayed the cause; and whether they choose to acknowledge it, or not, be fully convinced that if he did not wish to answer the work, he should have let it alone; or if the ground of argument were unfair, he should have proved it so, and not have set up another which had no relation to it?

Thus it is, That Dr. Toulmin has *shifted the ground of the argument*: and what is that ground to which he gives the preference? He wished, it seems, to try “the practical efficacy of the Unitarian doctrine by the test of scriptural facts.” Are those facts then a proper medium for such a trial? I have been used to think that every tree was to be tried by its *own* fruits, and not by those of another. *Scriptural facts*, such as those which Dr. Toulmin alleges, afford a proper test of the practical efficacy of *scripture doctrines*; and if brought against the cause of infidelity, would be in point. But there is no question in this case, whether scripture truth be of a practical nature, but

wherein it consists ? The *facts* to which Dr. Toulmin wishes to draw the reader's attention prove nothing in favour of Unitarianism, or Trinitarianism : for before they can be brought to bear, the work of proof must be accomplished by other means. An attempt to establish the practical efficacy of modern Unitarianism, by scriptural facts, is like producing the fruits of Palestine in order to ascertain the soil of Taunton.

Dr. Toulmin complained of my animadverting on particular passages in the writings of Unitarians, and suggested that I ought rather to have applied my arguments to the general, the fundamental principles of their system ; “ That there is *one* God, the Father, and one Mediator between God and man, the *man* Christ Jesus.” To this it was answered, ‘ The unity of God, and the humanity of Christ, then it seems, are the principles which I ought to have attacked ; that is, I ought to have attacked principles which I profess to believe, and not those which I profess to disbelieve.’—“ But (says Dr. T. in reply) does he receive these principles in the *pure and simple form* in which Unitarians embrace them ?”*

The doctor ought to have expressed his fundamental principles *in his own words*, and not in those of scripture. Every controversial writer, who does not wish to beg the question, will do so. He ought to have said, Mr. Fuller, instead of animadverting on particular passages in the writings of Unitarians, should have attacked their first principles ; That God is *one person*, and that Christ is *merely a man*. This had been fair and open : and had the objection been made in this form, I might have replied to this effect ;—My object was not to attack particular principles, so much as the general tendency of their religion,

taken in the gross ; and the passages on which I animadverted, chiefly related to this view of the subject. Yet, in the course of the work, I have certainly attempted to prove *the divinity of Christ* ; and whatever goes to establish this doctrine, goes to demolish those leading principles, which, it is said, I ought to have attacked : for if Christ be God, he cannot be *merely* a man, and there must be more than *one person* in the Godhead.—But not contented with expressing his leading principles in his own words, Dr. Toulmin chooses scripture language for the purpose. This, I contended, was begging the question ; or taking it for granted that the terms *one God*, in scripture, mean *one person*, and that Christ's being called *a man* denotes that he was *merely* a man. To shew the impropriety of this proceeding, I alleged, that I believed both the unity of God, and the humanity of Christ ; and therefore ought not to be expected to oppose either of them. “ But does he receive these principles (says Dr. T.) in the *pure and simple form* in which Unitarians embrace them ? ” What is this but saying, that I do not admit the Socinian *gloss* upon the apostle's words ? Dr. Toulmin may contend, that the scriptures express his sentiments so plainly as to need no gloss ; but a gloss it manifestly is. He may call it *a pure and simple form*, or what he pleases ; but nothing is meant by it beyond a gloss, nor proved, except the prevalence of his easy-besetting sin, that of begging the question.

To show in a still stronger light the unfairness of a controversial writer's attempting to shroud his opinions under the phraseology of scripture, I supposed it to be done by a Calvinist, and asked what Dr. Toulmin would say to it in that case ? I could say for example, *There is a Father, a Son, and a Holy Spirit*, in

whose name we are baptised—*The Word was God—Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures*; and could require Socinians not to animadvert on particular passages in Calvinistic writers, but on *these our leading principles*. Would they admit, or ought they to be expected to admit of these as our leading principles? No: Dr. Toulmin has given proof that he does not, and has thereby justified me in refusing to admit the same thing on his side of the question. He will not allow that our leading principles are expressed by these passages of scripture, because they say nothing of the Father, Son, and Spirit being *one God*, nor of a *sameness of essence*, &c. &c.* Very well: Neither do I allow that his leading principles are expressed by the passages he has produced; for they say nothing of God's being *one person*, or of Christ's being *merely* a man. If the scriptures which I alleged, express my sentiments *as fully* as the passages he has produced express his, that is sufficient. My object was not to join issue in endeavouring to prove that my sentiments were expressly and fully contained in scripture language; but to shew the futility of such pretences on either side. So far from "affecting to shew that the first principles of the Calvinists are to be expressed in the words of scripture," it was manifestly my design to shew that the practice of so expressing them *in controversy*, was objectionable, in that it takes for granted that which requires to be proved.

It is true, as Dr. Toulmin says, that if he, or any other person, were to offer to subscribe the passages which I have produced, as exhibiting a creed tantamount to ours, we should demur to admit it in this view. But this, instead of overturning my reasoning, confirms it, and cuts the throat of his own argument:

for it is no less true that if I, or any other person, were to offer to subscribe the passages produced by him, as exhibiting a creed tantamount to his, he would demur to admit it in this view. Nay more : in his case it is beyond supposition. I have actually offered to subscribe the apostle's words, and he has actually refused to admit my subscription, alleging, that I do not receive them in that *pure and simple form* in which Unitarians embrace them. According to his own reasoning, therefore, the words of the apostle by which he would express his leading principles do not contain the *whole* of them, and he must have failed in his attempt to express them in scripture language ; and consequently, the "boasted superiority" of his scheme, even in this respect, is without foundation.

If we can believe Dr. Toulmin, however, the scriptures not only expressly declare God to be one, but *one person*. "This simple idea of God, that he is one single person, (says he from Mr. Lindsey) literally pervades every passage of the sacred volumes." To this I have answered, among other things, 'It might have served a better purpose, if, instead of this general assertion, these gentlemen had pointed us to *a single instance* in which the unity of God is literally declared to be personal.' And what has Dr. Toulmin said in reply ? "The appeal, one would think, might be made to Mr. Fuller's own good sense. What can be more decisive instances of this than the many passages in which the singular personal pronouns, and their correlates are used concerning the Supreme Being ; as *I, me, my, mine, &c.*"* Whatever may be thought of my good sense, or of that of my opponent, I appeal to good sense itself, whether he have made good his assertion. To say nothing of his reducing it from *every*

passage, to many passages, which probably strikes out ninety-nine passages out of a hundred in the sacred volumes: If the singular personal pronouns be a literal declaration that God is one person, the plural personal pronouns, Let *us* make man in *our* image, &c. must equally be a literal declaration that he is more than one. The singular personal pronouns also which are frequently applied to the Holy Spirit,* contain a decisive proof, yea, a literal declaration of his personality; and which inevitably draws after it the doctrine of the trinity.

Dr. Toulmin has said much about *judging the heart*, (pp. 95—101, Note :) but his objection does not seem to lie against judging, so much as judging Unitarians. If I affirm what the scriptures uniformly teach,† That a false and immoral system has its origin not in simple mistake, but in disaffection to God,‡ this is highly presumptuous, this is judging the heart: but if Dr. Toulmin pronounce my mode of arguing to be “savouring of spleen and ill-nature, and evidently *designed* to fix an opprobrium and disgrace,” (p. 134) the case is altered.

It is right to judge of the disposition of the heart by “overt acts;” that is, by words and deeds: but where this judgment is directed against Unitarians, it is not right after all; for it is possible we may judge uncandidly and unjustly! It is right for Dr. T. to disregard the profession of his opponent, when he declares

* John xiv. 26. xv. 26. xvi. 7—15. 1 Cor. xii. 11.

† 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11. 2 Pet. ii. 1. 1 John iv. 6. Jude 4.

‡ The reader will recollect that what is affirmed at the close of the Letters is merely hypothetical, and rests upon the supposition of Socinianism being what I had attempted to prove it—a false and immoral system.

his belief in the unity of God, and the humanity of Christ, and expresses that belief in the words of scripture, because he does not "receive these principles in the *pure and simple form* in which Unitarians embrace them." But if we disregard *their* professions, and require any thing more than a declaration of their faith in the words of scripture, we set up "*our* gospel, or the gospel according to *our views* of it;" and act contrary to our professed principles as Protestants, as dissenters, and as Baptists.

When our creed and worship are such that they cannot conscientiously join them, they have a right to separate from us, otherwise they could not "keep the commandments of Jesus pure and undefiled:" But whatever be their creed, or the tenor of their conversation, or prayers, we have no right to refuse communion with them.

If we do not model our professions, preaching, and worship, so as to give no offence to an individual of their principles, we "assume a power which no christian, or body of christians possesses:" yet they do not model their professions, preaching, or worship, so as to give no offence to us; nor do we desire they should. They do not confine themselves to the words of scripture; nor is it necessary they should. They inquire whether our professions accord with the *meaning* of scripture; and we claim to do the same. The reason why Dr. T. will not allow of this and other claims, must, I should think, be this: Their views of the gospel are "*pure and simple*," and ours are *corrupt*. Thus it is, reader, that he goes about to prove that he does not "take for granted the principles on which he argues," and that "he assumes nothing!"—If Dr. T. can persuade himself and his friends, that he

has not shifted the ground of the argument, has not assumed what he should have proved, and, in short, has not tacitly acknowledged Socinianism to be indefensible on the ground of its moral tendency, they are welcome to all the consolation such a persuasion will afford them.

All I shall add will be, a brief defence of the *principle* on which the foregoing Letters are written. To undermine this, is a point at which all my opponents have aimed. The practical efficacy of a doctrine *in the present age* is a subject, it seems, which ought not to be discussed as the test of its being true. They are to a man, however, against it: a pretty clear evidence this, that it does not speak good concerning them.

Mr. Belsham, in his *Review of Mr. Wilberforce*, glancing at *The systems compared*, says, "The amount of it is; we Calvinists being much better christians than you Socinians, our doctrines must of course be true."—"The Unitarians (he adds) will not trespass upon the holy ground. We have learned that *not he who commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.*" And, "Be it known to Mr. Wilberforce, and to all who like him are disposed to condemn their brethren unheard, that if the Unitarians were inclined to boast, they have whereof to glory. And if they took pleasure in exposing the faults of their orthodox brethren, they likewise have tales to unfold which would reflect little credit on the parties, or on their principles. But of such mutual reproaches there would be no end."*

Dr. Toulmin alleges that "It is a mode of arguing very unfavourable to *candour*, and fair discussion, savouring of *spleen* and *ill-nature*, principally calcu-

lated to *misrepresent* and *irritate*, and evidently designed to fix an opprobrium and disgrace"—that when our Saviour cautioned his followers to *beware of false prophets*, who should be *known by their fruits*, he meant not persons who would teach *false doctrine*, and whose lives would accord with it; but persons of insincere *character*, whose doctrine might nevertheless be true—and that his brethren have not reasoned against Calvinism from the immoral *lives* of Calvinists, but merely from the immoral *tendency* of their principles.*

If the mode of arguing pursued in the foregoing Letters be liable to all these objections, it is rather singular that it should not have been objected to till it was pointed against Socinianism. If it can be shewn to be a mode of arguing consonant to the directions given by our Saviour, and actually used by the apostles, the fathers, the reformers, the puritans, and even by our opponents themselves, their objecting to it in this instance will prove nothing, except it be the weakness of their cause.

Our Saviour warned his followers to *beware of false prophets*, and gave this direction concerning them: *Ye shall know them by their fruits.*† This direction, founded in self-evident truth, and enforced by the head of the christian church, appeared to me to furnish a proper criterion by which to judge of the claims, if not of every particular opinion, yet of every *system* of opinions, pretending to divine authority.

Mr. Kentish admitted that "The effects produced by a doctrine was a proper criterion of its *value*, but not of its *truth*." But the value of a doctrine implies its truth. Falsehood is of no value: whatever

* Pages 134, 148, 154. † Matt. vii. 15—20.

proves a doctrine valuable, therefore, must prove it to be true.

Mr. Kentish farther objects : “ This celebrated saying of our Saviour is proposed as a test of *character*, and not as a criterion of *opinion*.” To the same purpose Dr. *Toulmin* alleges, that “ This is a rule given to judge not concerning *principles*, but *men*; not concerning the sentiments promulgated by them, but concerning their own characters and pretensions.—The persons here pointed at are hypocrites and false prophets : such as would falsely pretend a commission from God. Their pretensions might be blended with a *true doctrine* ; but their claims were founded in dissimulation. They would be discovered by their covetousness, love of gain, and lasciviousness.” p. 148.

These writers are in general exceedingly averse to judging *men*, considering it as uncandid, and presumptuous, and plead for confining all judgment to *things* ; but in this case *things* seem to be in danger, and therefore *men* are left to shift for themselves.

According to this exposition, it is the duty of christians, when ministers discover an avaricious and ambitious disposition, though sound in doctrine, and in time past apparently humble and pious, to set them down as hypocrites. And this is more *candid*, it seems, and savours less of *spleen* and *ill-nature* than drawing an unfavourable conclusion of their doctrinal principles.

But waving this : The saying of our Saviour is given as a test of *false* prophets, or teachers ; an epithet never bestowed, I believe, on men whose doctrine was *true*. That false prophets and teachers were men of bad character, I admit, though that character was not always

apparent :* but that they are ever so denominated on account of their character, as distinct from their doctrine, does not appear. When any thing is said of their doctrine, it is invariably described as false. *If any man shall say unto you, lo here is Christ, or lo there, BELIEVE HIM NOT : for false Christs, and FALSE PROPHETS, bearing witness in their favour, shall arise—There were FALSE PROPHETS among the people, even as there shall be FALSE TEACHERS among you, who privily shall bring in DAMNABLE HERESIES, even DENYING THE LORD THAT BOUGHT THEM, and bring upon themselves swift destruction—Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God : because many FALSE PROPHETS are gone out into the world—Every spirit that CONFESSETH NOT THAT JESUS CHRIST IS COME IN THE FLESH, is not of God—Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the DOCTRINE OF CHRIST, hath not God—If there come any unto you, and bring not THIS DOCTRINE, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed : for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.†*

If the *false prophets* described by our Saviour were such as might teach “a true doctrine,” the descriptions given by the New-Testament writers, uniformly representing them as teaching falsehood, are at variance with those of their master.

That there were hypocrites who taught a true doctrine, may be allowed : but they are never denominated *false prophets, or false teachers*. Balaam was a wicked character, and is called *a prophet* ; but as the subject matter of his prophecies were true, he is not called a

* 2 Cor. xi. 14. Matt. vii. 15.

† Mark xiii. 21, 22. 2 Pet. ii. 1. 1 John iv. 1—3.

2 John 10, 11.

false prophet. Judas also was a hypocrite and a thief, at the same time that he was a preacher and an apostle ; but as what he taught was true, he is not described as a *false* teacher, or a *false* apostle.

These things considered, let the impartial reader determine, Whether our Saviour did not mean to direct his followers to judge by their fruits, *who were the patrons of false doctrine ?*

With respect to the *use* which has been made of this direction, I appeal in the first place to the *apostles*, and New-Testament writers. I presume they will not be accused of self-commendation, nor of spleen and ill-nature ; yet they scrupled not to represent those who believed their doctrine as *washed* and *sanctified* from their former immoralities ; and those who believed it not as *having pleasure in unrighteousness*.* All those *facts* which Dr. Toulmin has endeavoured to press into the service of modern Unitarianism are evidences of the truth of the primitive doctrine, and were considered as such by the New-Testament writers. They appealed to the effects produced in the lives of believers as *living epistles, known and read of all men*, in proof that they *had not corrupted the word of God*, but were the true ministers of Christ.† With the fullest confidence they asked, *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God ?*‡ Plainly intimating that truth was well known by its effects. Nor was error less so : those who introduced false doctrines are invariably described as unholy characters.||

To quote the reasonings of the *fathers* on this principle, were to copy a large proportion of their *apologies*. I question whether there be one of them which does not

* 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. 2 Thess. ii. 12. † 2 Cor. ii. 17. iii. 1—3.

‡ 1 John v. 5. || 2 Pet. ii. 1—3. Jude. 1 Cor. xv. 33, 34.

contain arguments for the truth of christianity on the ground of the holy lives of christians ; and which does not infer, or in some form intimate, the falsehood of heathenism from the known immorality of heathens. Their opponents having no better answer at hand, might possibly charge this reasoning with vain boasting, spleen, and ill-nature : but I do not recollect that it was ever imputed to these causes by christians.

As to the *reformers*, the most successful attacks which they made upon the church of Rome, were founded on the dissolute lives of her clergy, and the holiness and constancy of those whom she persecuted unto death. The general strain of their writings may be seen in Fox's Martyrology, which is in effect an exhibition of the moral character of the persecutors and the persecuted, from which the world is left to judge which was the true religion : and I may add, a considerable part of the world did judge, and acted accordingly.

Dr. Toulmin suggests from *Mosheim*, that the reformers, and particularly Calvin and his associates, neglected the science of morals.* But Mosheim's prejudices against Calvin and his associates render his testimony of but little weight, especially as the reader may satisfy himself of the contrary by the writings of the parties, which are yet extant. The eighth chapter of the second book of *Calvin's Institutes* is sufficient to wipe away this slander. The morality there inculcated is such as neither Antinomians, nor "great numbers" amongst modern Unitarians, can endure. That there were some among the *gospellers*, as they were called, who were loose characters, is admitted : such there are in every age : but take the reformed as a body, and

they were not only better christians than their persecutors, but than those their successors, who, while pretending to teach the "science" of morality, have deserted the great principles by which it requires to be animated, and debased it by allowing the amusements of the theatre, and other species of dissipation, to be consistent with it.

The historian of the *Puritans* has recorded of that persecuted people, that "While others were at plays and interludes, at revels, or walking in the fields, or at the diversions of bowling, fencing, &c. on the evening of the Sabbath, they, with their families, were employed in reading the scriptures, singing psalms, catechising their children, repeating sermons, and prayer—That neither was this confined to the Lord's day, but they had their hours of family devotion on the week-days, esteeming it their duty to take care of the souls as well as of the bodies of their servants—and that they were circumspect as to all the excesses of eating and drinking, apparel and lawful diversions; being frugal in house-keeping, industrious in their particular callings, honest and exact in their dealings, and solicitous to give to every one his own."*

These things might not be alleged in proof of the truth of every particular opinion which they held; neither have I inferred from such premises the truth of every opinion maintained by Calvinists: but they were alleged in proof that their religion in the main *was that of Jesus Christ*, and the religion of their adversaries *a very near approach to that of Antichrist*. Nor do I recollect that the writer has been charged, unless it be by those who felt the condemnation which his story implied, with vain-boasting, spleen, or ill-nature.

* Neale's Hist. vol. i. chap. viii.

Finally : Will our opponents accuse *themselves* of these evils for having reasoned upon this principle as far as they are able ? That they have done this is manifest, though Dr. Toulmin affects to disown it, alleging, that they have not reasoned on the *lives* of men, but merely on the *tendency* of principles.* That they have reasoned on the tendency of principles, is true ; and so have I : such is the reasoning of the far greater part of the foregoing Letters. But that they avoided all reference to the *lives* of Calvinists, is not true. Was it on the tendency of principles, or on the lives of men, that Dr. Priestley reasoned, when he compared the *virtue* of Trinitarians with that of Unitarians, allowing that though the latter had more of an apparent conformity to the world than the former, yet upon the whole they approached nearer to the proper temper of christianity than they ?† Did he confine himself to the tendency of principles, in what he has related of Mr. Badcock ?‡ Does he not refer to the *practices* of Antinomians in proof of the immoral tendency of Calvinism, representing them as the legitimate offspring of our principles ?||

And though Mr. Belsham now affects to be disgusted with this mode of reasoning, yet there was a time when he seemed to think it would be of service to him, and when he figured away in the use of it. Did he not affirm, that “ they who are sincerely pious, and diffusively benevolent with our principles, could not have failed to have been much *better*, and much *happier*, had they adopted a milder, a more rational, a more truly evangelical creed ?” And what is this but affirming, that those of his sentiments are *better* and *happier* in general than others ?

* Page 154 † Dis. on Var. Sub. p. 100 ‡ Fam. Let. Let. xxii.

|| See the quotation, p. 95, of the foregoing Letters.

Yet this gentleman affects to despise the foregoing Letters, for that the sum of them is, "We Calvinists being much better christians than you Socinians, our doctrines must of course be true."* Strange, that a writer should so far forget himself, as to reproach the performance of another for that which is the characteristic of his own!

Nor is this all—In the small compass of the same discourse, he expresses a hope that Socinian converts would "at length feel the benign influence of their principles, and *demonstrate the excellence of their faith, by the superior dignity and worth of their character.*" If the excellence of principles, (and of course their truth, for nothing can be excellent which is not true) be not demonstrable by the character of those who embrace them, How is superior dignity and worth of character to demonstrate it?

Such was once the "self-commending" language of Mr. Belsham: but whether his converts have disappointed his hope, or whether the ground be too "holy" for him, so it is, that he is now entirely of a different mind; and what is worse, would fain persuade his readers that it is ground on which he and his brethren have never "trespassed."

This is the man, who after throwing down the gauntlet, declines the contest; and after his partisans have laboured to the utmost to maintain their cause, talks of what they *could say, and do*, were they not withheld by motives of generosity!

One would imagine from Mr. Belsham's manner of writing, that I had dealt largely in *tales* of private characters. The truth is, what tales have been told are of their own telling. I freely acknowledged that

* Review of Mr. Wilberforce, p. 274.

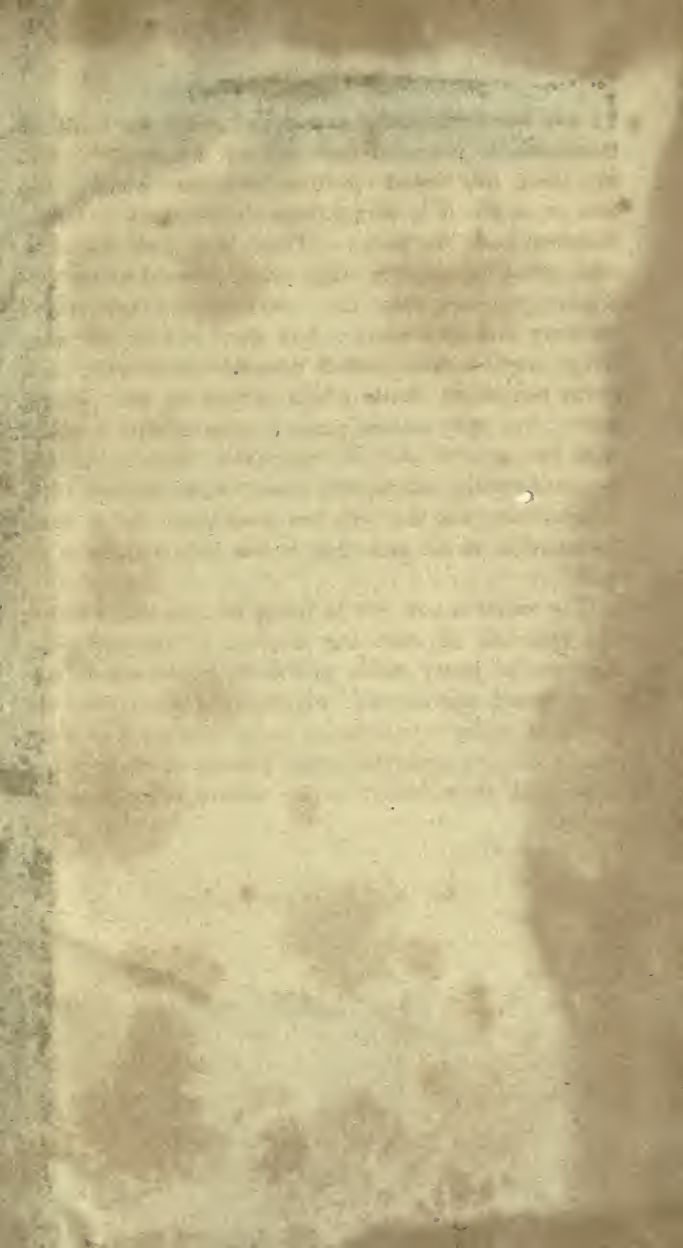
‘I was not sufficiently acquainted with the bulk of Socinians, to judge of their moral character.’* Every thing was rested on their own concessions; and this it is which is the galling circumstance to Mr. Belsham and his party. They may now insinuate what great things they *could* bring forward to our disadvantage, were they not restrained by motives of modesty and generosity: but they can do nothing. They might indeed collect tales of individuals, and point out many faults which attach to the general body: but they cannot prove it to be equally immoral with the general body of Socinians. Before this can be consistently attempted, they must retract their concessions; and this will not avail them, for it must be manifest to all men that it was only to answer an end.

The reader is now left to judge for himself, whether the principle of reasoning adopted in the foregoing Letters, be justly liable to the objections which have been raised against it; whether our opponents did not first apply it against us; and whether any other reason can be given for their present aversion to it, than that they feel it to be unfavourable to their cause.

A. F.

* See page 98, of the Letters.

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